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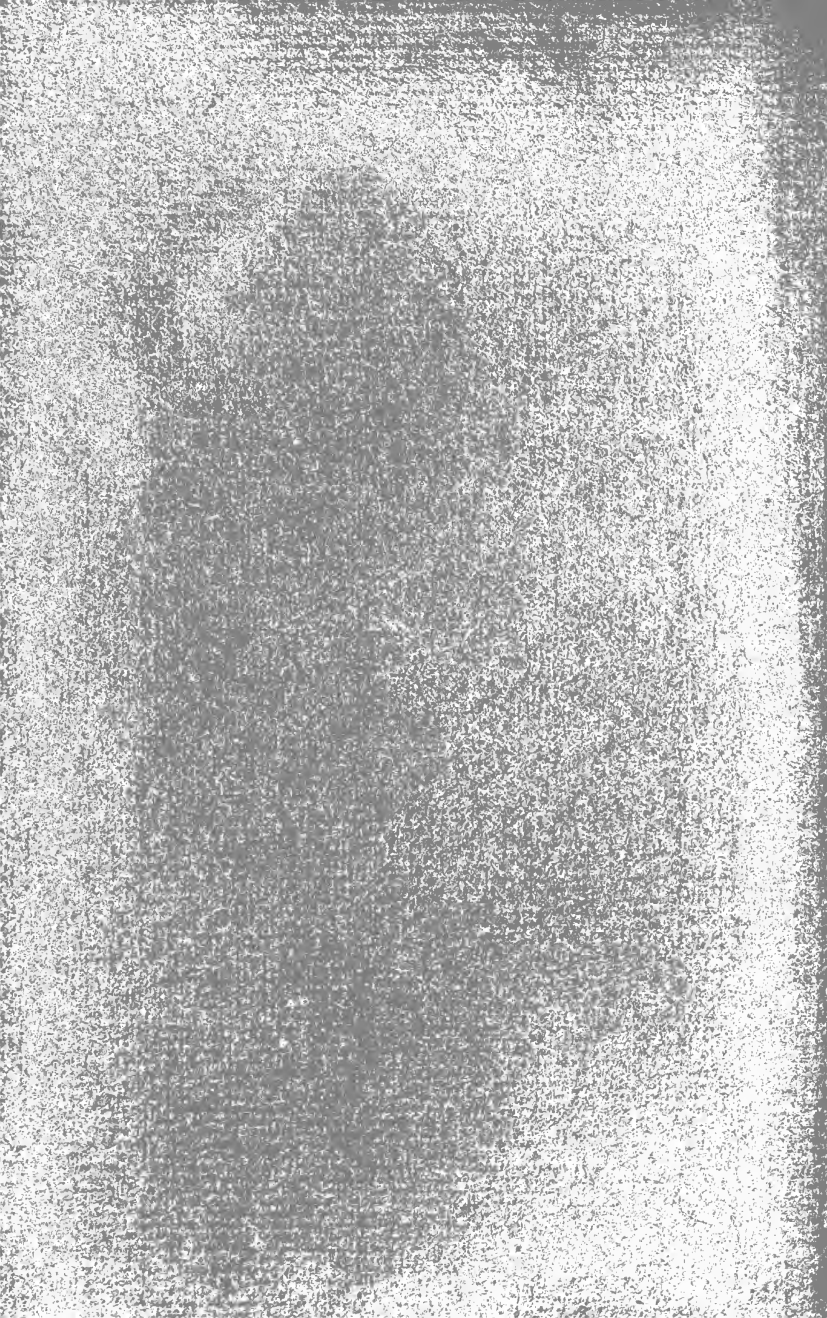
DUMS

JEAN MACPHERSON



Mabel Adamsou.

April 14th 1901.



Didums : a Silhouette

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Didums: a Silhouette

By

Jean Macpherson



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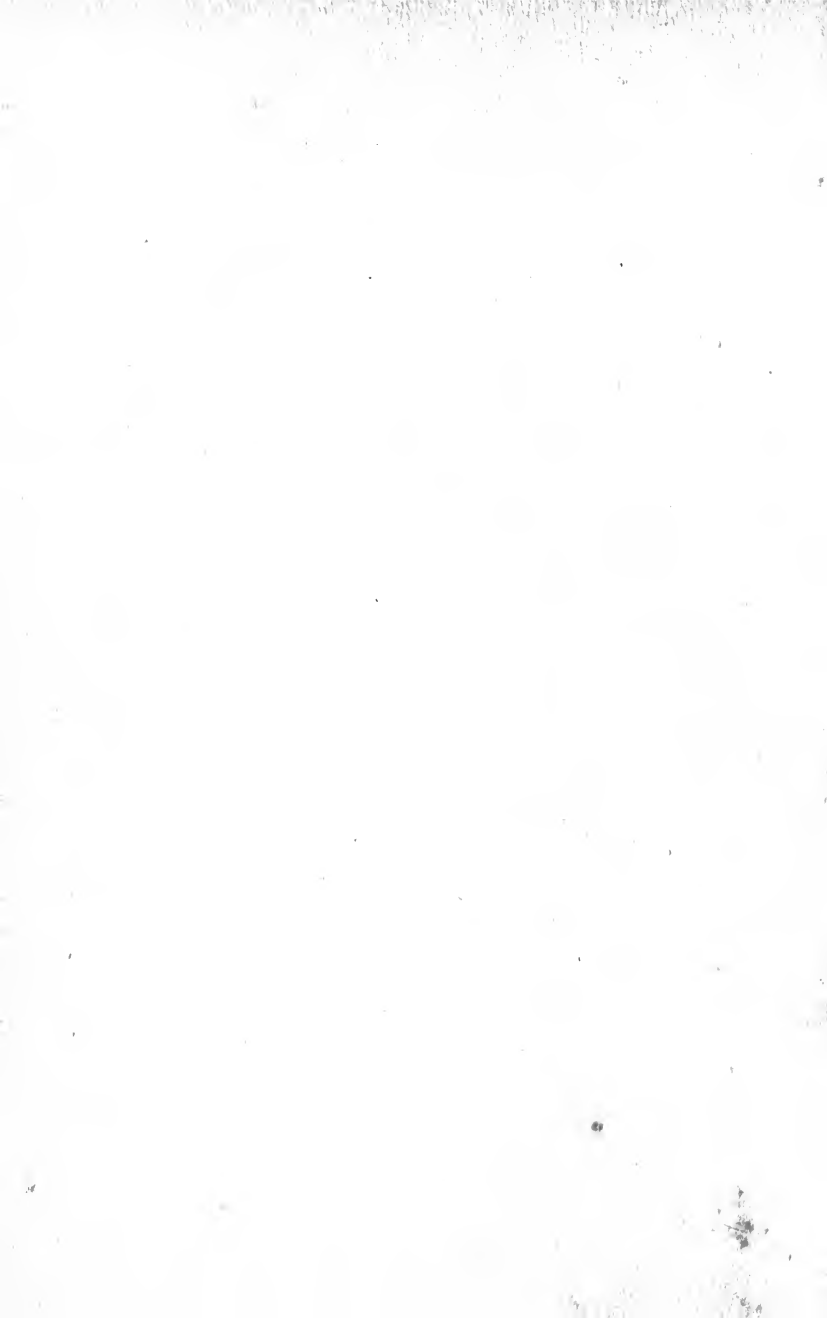


to
L. M: M.

" . . . on this earth are lovely souls,
That softly look with aidful eyes."

There may be heaven ; there must be hell ;
Meantime, there is our earth here—well !

BROWNING.



Didums: a Silhouette

I.

DREARY, but respectable. If a cobweb or two choked up the corners of the dining-room windows, and if the window-curtains looked like wrung-out towels, what of that? It was "Kensington, W.," and Mrs. Bliss could be recommended by the clergy. Mrs. Bliss had motherly feelings for her people. If the Misses Stormont, who had the "dining-rooms," had come down in the world, they were of "genteel birth," and not too much on "the minute" with their meals—for it was a hard-working world between taxes and all the new-fangled notions of the day. Not that Mrs. Bliss had ever quite forgiven Miss Didums—bless her bit face—for removing the stuffed canaries from

Didums

the mantel-piece, and the bit birds so real like—
'oppin', as it were, on the green bough.

But Miss Didums had her ways.

The dining-room was not a cheerful apartment. It had everything it ought to have, even to a picture of Her Majesty framed in shells. A stale odour of many dinners clung hopelessly to the gravy-stained carpet, the pattern of which had been brushed away. True, the heavy, old-fashioned sideboard had a solemn, finger-marked dignity all its own, but its doors had a melancholy "creak," and the newspapers lining the inside had been turned and re-turned with depressing economy.

This afternoon the dining-room was sunk in shadow. The thick November fog had not lifted all day, and the thin light from a feeble street lamp flickered mournfully in through the gloom, and across the "portrait of a lady" hanging over the piano, giving a weird grin to her lemon-coloured lips. There had been an evident attempt to educate even the lady with the lemon-coloured lips—a dark sash had been so twisted

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about her that at least one forgot to look at her. An art rug, of comforting hue, had been tucked with careful carelessness over the ugly sofa, now occupied by a girl in a somewhat faded tea-gown, who yawned and sighed alternately as she stretched out her smartly-slippered feet the better to examine the Parisian heels. She was a pretty girl, with a cold, well-chiselled, well-put-together kind of prettiness, that did not suggest intellect of a genial order, or any overflowing tenderness of character. Her mouth was thin-lipped and cross. Her blue eyes, bright as sapphires, had keen corners, which robbed them of real charm. She was an ornament to a room, but she fidgeted the air of it. At one time she had been a good deal "described" in society journals. She had fluffy, pale gold hair, carefully dressed after the latest fashion, a good natural complexion and a sharp nose. Even yet women grudged her her "certain style." She knew how to dress, "poor thing," but, of course, now she had nothing to dress *on*.

Society had known only one sister. The other,

Didums

some said, taught music, a chit of a thing, who ought to be at school. But Min Stormont and her sister were things of the past with everybody who was anybody. Now that their uncle, old Sir William, had seen fit to patronise another planet, and had left all his money to someone who did not need it, there was no further necessity of remembering what or *where* his orphan nieces were. Besides, someone always took those sort of girls as nursery governesses or something, if—a very big if—they did not go to the bad. The world shook its head and forgot them, and meanwhile, Min Stormont, satisfied with the height of her heels, slept a little, and forgot the world.

“Is that *you*, child? What a start you gave me!”

“Sorry.”

The answer came out of the shadow in something between a sigh and a growl.

Min Stormont rubbed her eyes, yawned, and spoke again in the low tone of complaint she generally reserved for her sister.

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"You're late, child. What have you been doing? My goodness, Didums, don't pitch your music about like that."

"What have I been *doing*? Teaching others to soar into heaven while I have to grovel in hell."

"Really, Didums, you know! You shouldn't use such strong language. It's a distressing habit, and temper disturbs one's expression so, and then one has to take to lanoline and massage. You——" Min yawned again and glanced at the flashing ring on her slender left hand. "You ought to get out of the *habit* of temper."

"Ought I? Is the tea cold? I'm simply starving."

"Well, I'm afraid it is, and the butter is as usual rather thinly breaded."

"Can't we have the loaf up?"

"Butter's finished," said Min absently.

"Hang the butter! I'll have it dry then. You might ring that bell."

Min sighed. Didums' moods were most

Didums

trying, and just when she wanted to tell her about Cecil Power. Of course, it was hard for the child to have to teach music all day, but surely, her tea might have waited.

“Thank you.”

Didums smiled her sweetest smile to the over-worked maid-of-all-work. She was now eating an enormous bit of brown crust in her favourite rocking-chair; her hat thrown back on her head, her hair anyhow. Yes, the child was trying, and when that ungetatable look came over Didums' face one might talk oneself hoarse and she never heard. Not a bad-looking child, either, her sister thought regretfully, glancing at her with new interest. Pity she had not more colour. Her face looked smaller and whiter than ever. Certainly, Didums had a lovely nose, a nose many a society beauty could not boast. Didums' nose was so delicately chiselled, and could stand the most critical examination. Perhaps it was her nose that gave her face such a sad look. And what a tiny head the child had—all eyes and hair! But then

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she was *all* little Didums ; little hands, little feet, little ears, little everything. Her eyes were the only big things about her, and they were big enough. They looked to-night as if they had been rubbed in with blue-black ink. There was something uncomfortable about Didums' eyes; they had such an odd way of seeing nothing, and they were so dark.

Pity Didums was always thinking—another bad habit to get into.

“Didums!”

“Yes, dearie.”

The voice was sleepy and not promising.

“When you've quite *finished*,” said her sister with satirical emphasis, “I wish to speak to you.”

“All right ; steam ahead !”

“Cecil Power was here to-day, and I've agreed to marry him in a month.”

“You have—agreed to—marry Cecil Power in a month ?”

“Yes. Why not? You needn't glare at me like that, child. He's got plenty of money, and he's awfully in love with me.”

Didums

"He must, indeed, be *pretty* far gone! Does he realise you haven't a penny to bless yourself with? Rich men, you know, my dear Min, don't, as a rule, care to support a wife."

"He quite realises, thank you, that I haven't got a penny. Remember, Didums, I'm not exactly an ugly girl. Money isn't everything."

"Isn't it? Really! So far my experience has been otherwise. Money, my dear Min, *is* everything, and always will be till the end of the chapter. What could *money* not give one? Money can buy one a soul. Even the *gods* hold out their hands for tips! Music wants money, painting wants money, everything and everybody wants money, barring the devil. *He* takes you gratis, hospitable old chap that he is. But to return to our muttons—you're going to marry that classic-looking idiot, Cecil Power? Are you, may I ask, in love with him?"

"I—I think so," said her sister with hesitation.

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"Hadn't you better be *sure* of it? It is as well to be *sure* on those occasions."

"I think you might be kinder, Didums, and be so awfully nice about everything, too. He quite understands you'll have to live with us, though I could see he didn't quite like the idea at first.

"*What?*" cried the girl, starting up in her chair. "*I* live with you! No thanks. I shall not inflict Cecil Power with my society. Very good of both of you to think of it."

For a moment or two an angry flush swept the face of the younger sister.

"No, Min," her voice growing quieter, "it would never do. Husband and wife don't want a third person. But, oh, Min, do you love him? Will it last through all the puddings and pastries of life? *There's* where the rub comes in! Min, don't go and hang yourself straight away without thinking first. Thinking has to be done sometime. Don't leave your hell to the last, as most people do. We're all entitled to a touch of

Didums

heaven when we're dying. Oh, Min, don't mar that heaven!"

The big eyes were wistful, and had a look in them Min hardly cared to meet.

"Our life, Min, our present life, is wretched enough, but we've got our *souls* firm. Even texts and dirty carpets can't take them away. But wouldn't it be awful, if, after a few weeks rush of honeymoon you found you didn't love him?"

"Don't be an utter goose, Didums. Marriage is a very ordinary thing. Every girl gets married. It's not a thing to make a fuss over. Cecil and I are not a pair of sentimental fools. He quite understands that I get his money in return for my beauty. I *am* very pretty, you know, child."

"Well, I hope you'll be happy, Min."

"Of course I shall. You've just said yourself that money means everything. But you were always a parcel of contradictions," said her sister with some heat.

Didums threw her head back on the crimson

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cushion attached to the rocking-chair, and fixed her eyes on the text over the mantel-piece :—

“I am the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd

Giveth His Life for the Sheep.”

“Then you won’t come and live with us, Didums?”

“No, Min.”

“Where do you propose living?” inquired her sister with faint amusement, glancing at her over the palm fan she had picked up.

“Here.”

“Nonsense! You can’t live here without a chaperon.”

“Why not?”

“Why not? Because it’s out of the question. I don’t wish to have my sister talked about.”

“*Talked about!* Don’t be an idiot, Min! You know very well that heaps of girls live alone in London, and no one’s a bit the wiser.”

Didums

“*Ladies* never do.”

“Rubbish! For the matter of that, on special occasions the landlady can pose as my chaperon; just the style to put a man on his mettle. For the rest the Good Shepherd may keep an eye on me. Let us pray.”

“Really, Didums!”

“Dear Good Shepherd, keep an eye on this little sheep when alone in the whirl of this sinful city. Amen. Now, then, pass me a cigarette. I feel merry to-night.”

“Didums, you ought to get out of that habit.”

“What habit? Smoking? Why the dickens can’t a girl have a harmless puff or two? Men can smoke, and drink too. No wonder they are able to bear their burdens placidly.”

“That’s all very well, but—but it takes away a certain girlish charm, dear.”

“And what does that ‘girlish charm’ consist of, may I ask?” lighting the cigarette with a cynical little smile. “Girlish charm!” she mused. “Let me see now, in other words that flutter of

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eyelid; that"—she whistled out the smoke—"that tremble of lace at the throat. Ah! isn't she *sweet*? In these days, my dear girl, we have to leave our sweetness to the Great Undertaker. 'Girlish charm' is out of date. For a little music-teacher, girlish cheek is more to the point. 'Girlish charm' may win you a smile, but cheek will win you a quid."

"You positively unnerve me, Didums. You might show a little consideration for other people's feelings, and that bill worrying me so."

"How much does it come to this week?"

"Three pounds and something."

"Um! Let me see it. Two shillings for cabbage. That seems a good deal. It strikes me Bliss knows how to lay it on."

"Don't grudge the cabbage, Didums. It's good for one's complexion."

"Ah! Then I suppose we'd better stick to it. One's complexion is a great consideration. Let's die *clean*, whatever we may be afterwards."

Didums

Min gave a delicate shiver.

"You always make me feel so chilly," she grumbled.

"Sorry, but I don't feel particularly warm myself. What row's going on upstairs? Bliss beginning her spring cleaning?"

"Somebody's taken the drawing-room; an old friend of mine"—Min laughed pleasantly and looked prettily conscious—"took the rooms for his aunt, Lady Cottrell."

"By Jove! we're getting on, we're getting on. Another cigarette, dearie. And who is Lady Cottrell?"

"Oh, somebody I knew once; an old frump who talks of *Thackeray*!"

"And the friend? Shouldn't think Power would approve of the friend."

"I wish," said her sister fretfully, "you would speak in a less robust fashion—and of my future husband, too."

But the ungetatable look had again crept over Didums' face.

What had *Didums* to think about? her sister

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sometimes wondered. She had no worries, no history. Min hated anything she could not understand.

True, Didums had no "history." What could her great eyes see in the thin unnourishing greyness of her life, where every day was only *another* every day, without one leaf of hope "broad enough for waving!"

Yet her eyes were sometimes rich, as are the eyes of people who wish, and feed on dreams. She watched her little clouds of smoke as she had used to watch the clouds rolling along the sky long ago, when her blue sashes touched the tops of the tallest daisies. Then, even then, her dark lashes were lifted wistfully, for in the forlornness of her little world she had told the daisies many strange things—how the white shiny clouds were the good people going to heaven, and the long, gloomy, black ones the poor bad people who tried to be good and couldn't, going slowly and fearfully to hell.

Poor black, bad people.

Didums

The daisies had not always been dry-eyed.

The agony of those child-days never wholly dimmed—the hideous God—the hideous little brown frocks, so unlike the flowers—the awful energy of voices—the “Do try to be more like *other* little girls”—the indignity of Musts and Mustn’ts—the weight of dull, unintelligible failure.

“Now you must *sleep*.”

With hot hands pressed over bright, bright eyes, she used to tell herself stories in the supperless darkness, to shut out nameless dreads of the living and the dead.

There—was—once—a—frog.

Each word, drawn out to a minute’s length under the suffocating bed-clothes, held a little life of bravely enforced struggle after the obedience demanded of her, till the strain relaxed under the pale-gleaming stars, and all the world was only a leaning mushroom.

The daisies used to wonder why her hands were so hot. They did not know that she was not free, as they, to grow beautifully. *They*

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had pink on their cheeks, and they played games of kisses with the bluebells and butterflies, but Didums played no games, and had no pink in her cheeks. She had been left to the care of strangers, well-meaning, fretful people who "knew *best*," whose querulous inconsistencies and perpetual fault-finding bewildered and stupefied her.

She had no remembrance of love. She had wanted to love Min, but Min had had no time for her, and her knowledge of father and mother had been gathered from a tombstone wreathed with a text:—

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus i. 2.)

The tombstone had only frightened her.

"Never, *never*," she had pleaded, "let us go there again!"

That was how Min called her "queer," and she continued to be "queer," even with tidier curls

Didums

and grown-up slippers, for when left alone she was "Didums" still, with the same mystic child-face, duskily lit by its sorrowful star-eyes.

II.

A GROUP of about half a dozen men were gossiping in the smoke-room of an extremely exclusive London club.

"What's up with Power?" drawled one, swallowing back a yawn. "Met him yesterday. Looks as if he were going in for district visiting."

"Eh?" said one of the number, lighting a cigar. "Woman, I presume?"

"Imphim," said another, with a low laugh. "Going to marry old Sir William Drayton's niece, Min Stormont."

"Jove!" ejaculated a fair youth incredulously. "Another good man gone wrong! But are you sure?"

"Sure as God made little apples. Heard it from Tiddy, and one can always depend upon Tiddy; but here he comes! Say, Tiddy!"

"Hullo, Chambers! Coming for a dander?"

Didums

Hear the latest about Reggie, by the way? Haw-haw! Big duffer, Reggie, no mistake. Why he couldn't have done the thing decently I can't make out. No use running away with a woman nowadays—*quite* unnecessary. But those fellows who give little moral lectures all round generally come to a rather—er—vulgah end. Fact is, it's in a little matter of this kind that a fellow's good breeding comes out weally and truly."

"Yes, yes," interrupted one of the men impatiently; "heard all that. But what's this about Power?"

"Aw, be Jove! Of course. Quite forgot. Quite a joke, I assure you. Actually going to marry one of old Drayton's nieces. Fresh-looking gal—strapping figah—biggish feet though."

"Go on."

"Well, as you all know," said Tiddy, with a delicate wave of his delicate cane, "Power paid a good deal of attention to the gal when there was some prospect of old Drayton leaving her all his money, and now that she is penniless some absurd idea of *honour* has taken possession

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of him, and he must needs stick to her. Now if it had been the little sistah, could have sympathised with the fellow."

"Oh, there's a sister?" put in the man Chambers. "And where, may I inquire, did you come across *her*?"

"Well, to be—er—candid," rejoined Tiddy, "about a fortnight ago I spotted a pretty little gal with music under her arm in Kensington High Street, and I—er—naturally offered—haw-haw!—to relieve her of her burden. She—well, fact is she—er—checked me properly, little spitfire, so, of course, what could a fellow do after that but find out where she lived? And—haw-haw!—to cut a long story short, discovered she lived with her sistah, and that the sistah was none other than Min Stormont. Had a friendly chat with the landlady in the lower regions, and took rooms there and then for my aunt, Lady Cottrell, who was coming up to town just then. The dear old lady is rather surprised at her cheap quarters."

"You're a promising youth," grunted Chambers.

Didums

Tiddy winked knowingly.

“But look here,” he went on. “You—er—needn’t chaff Power. His tempah is not of the pleasantest. Love—haw-haw!—paralysed his brain.”

“Poor beggar,” said Chambers, glancing at a late edition of an evening paper. “Had no idea Power was a marrying man. But wonders will never cease! Take a month of Sundays to digest this sort of thing.”

“Haw-haw!” Tiddy winked again to a listener at the other side of the room, twisting the ends of his waxed moustache with a sudden air of innocence, as a tall, dark, manly-looking man about forty entered.

The new-comer nodded carelessly all round and sat down puffing a cigar, apparently lost in his own reflections. He looked a man who had a contempt for most things. He had a slow, indifferent way of looking about him, a keen, strong face, and wearily-lidded eyes—eyes which, if they had all the unseeing look of the habitually bored, impressed one with the idea

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that they could, if happily provoked, open boyishly and smile. His features were well-cut and almost beautiful. A heavy brown moustache hid the mouth, but the square jaw looked strong, though curiously sensitive. There was nothing worn about Power. The "good things" of this world had come his way, so that he had always been in a position to shape life to suit him. Like most men who look dangerous, he was very harmless. Like many men, he affected the coat of cynicism which covers so much gentleness, so much that is tragically simple. He belonged to the commonplace class of men who have given up problems—who drink more whisky and water on Sundays than on other days, and who are never by any chance "foolish," though their wisdom is not very wise, nor their goodness very good—who have fallen into the habit of harmlessness, of going round in a judicious middle-road circle that is neither one thing nor another. There is, perhaps, little excitement about it, but on the other hand there are no regrets, and in the end—a lean garment of respectability.

Didums

Power had never been a man of impulse, spurred hither and thither by each desire that in turn came uppermost, and now, he would not admit to himself that he had done anything to be regretted.

He had wisely decided to marry.

Marriage, no doubt, involved a good deal of giving up. A man of forty could not easily break through the crust of his selfishness, but after a lifetime of pleasing himself, he thought he would please his mother. His mother, like all good mothers, was anxious to see him settled, and having selected a girl after her own heart, of good birth and faultless figure—he had said pleasant things to her, picked up her fan, and given society generally to suppose it would end in the ordinary way.

What did he care about money? He had money enough, and perhaps he was sorry for the girl. Women were all the same to him, she would do very well, his mother thought so. He was not like a young man. "Feeling" did not come in at all. He doubted

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if he had any "feeling" left. He admired Min Stormont. If, in some ways, he would have liked the woman he married to be different from Min, and if, like other men, he had had his dream or two, and was made up of an unconscious sighing after indefinite "somethings," he did not now acknowledge this, or encourage reflection.

Power watched his rings of smoke curl ceiling-wards with the bored satisfaction of a weary man. He had no dreams now with regard to life—none whatsoever. He spelt it in three B's—Business, Bother, and Blank. He had had his fling, perhaps.

"Had dipped in life's struggle and out again;
Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see."

Power yawned, and looked at his watch. He told himself that he might as well take her the little gewgaw he had promised her. Was he, he wondered, expected to clothe as well as feed the little sister? he always forgot her name—

Didums

Diddy, or Didums, or some such foolery. He had scarcely bargained for the little sister. He laughed at one of Chambers's conundrums—the dry throat laugh he generally managed to scrape up—and rose from his chair with his accustomed air of masterly inactivity. (As a boy he had been wont to read Matthew Arnold.)

“'Pon my soul,” said Tiddy, swinging up against him in a corridor, “wish you joy! Saw it in the *Post* this morning. Romance in a nutshell, and all the rest of it. Haw! haw! Never had any desire to pay one woman's board myself——”

Power smothered an oath and banged out. The fog was three days old, and went down his throat as he found himself in the street, the noises of which to-night oppressed him with their familiar homelessness. For a minute or two he did a strange thing—he leaned against a letter-box, and stared moodily at the crowd. What was he thinking of? He hardly knew.

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It roared, it howled, it pushed, it crushed. It was called Life—going, going, going, without pause or break—whither no man could tell. Through veils of gloom the faces—London faces, like no other faces—with their sick hopes, cold fears, and subtle cunning; while from time to time, rising along the human shore, dull echoes and floating airs, the prevailing note of which was *Loneliness*.

There are little hungry boys who look in at bakers' windows, their longing eyes on the out-of-reach buns. There are also hungry men who, accidentally, passing the windows of their own souls, look wistfully at the vision of the life they *might* have led—a fairer, sweeter, nobler life.

Power, with a sudden rush of dreary inexpressible longing, gave something to a shivering child. The child, through chattering teeth, muttered a wondering "God bless you." He caught himself wishing the child would say it again. He was getting sentimental. He laughed, and buttoned up his coat.

Didums

“‘Satisfaction always will be—never is,’” he said to himself.

Then he hailed a hansom, and remembered the gewgaw.

III.

Andante.

Andante.



The first system of the musical score is for the introduction. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves are in 2/4 time and have one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Andante.' The key signature is B-flat major. The music begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The melody in the treble staff starts with a half note G4, followed by a half note F#4, and then a half note E4. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

cres *p*

sempre stacc

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It features a treble and bass staff. The treble staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment, primarily using eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is presented in a clear, black-and-white format.

Didums



"Do stop that thing, Didums, and for heaven's sake go and put on your pretty pink blouse. I expect Cecil, and I wish him to see you nicely dressed for once."

The music died. There was a curious quiet for a minute, then it might have been passion guarded to gentleness, or the merely mechanical response of a tired-out child.

"I really can't be bothered, Min. He'll have no eyes for me; besides, I'm going to bed early."

The *Andante* began again, but now with delicate deliberation and beating strength, as if the player were making a last desperate effort to make something out of nothing.

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Min shook out her belt-ribbons and rose from her chair, a fine pucker distorting her white brow.

"Very well," she grumbled as she left the room, "you always took your own way. Please ask the girl to put that pink globe on the gas. The light in this room is positively *hideous*!"

Did Didums hear? Min banged the door as if to make her, and went upstairs to rearrange a wayward "curl." She was alive to the importance of little things, especially as her *fiancé* was as yet undecided as to whether or not he would ask his mother to stay with them—an arrangement which did not fall in with Min's views.

The *Andante* went on, then suddenly stopped, and the player looked up at the lady with the lemon-coloured lips—looked up for a long, long time, as if fascinated by the dead-yellow countenance and unbeautiful features, always so senselessly the same.

She gave a shivering sigh.

Didums

The *Andante* went on again, sadly, softly, and solemnly.

The great spirits came sometimes. They comforted her with their deep-throated strength, with their old, old beautiful sorrow. She was part, they said, of the Everlasting Poem. Far away, beyond the sad echoes of time, there was life and room—room for dreams. Somewhere—where the wind loved low, where the airs of heaven fell down in dews, where lone lilies made light, there were surely paths for tired people.

* * * * *

Didums forgot about the pink globe. She had closed her great eyes with their wet forest of fringes.

"It will be very lonely in the evenings without Min. *Poor Min.*"

"You seem to be very sorry for your sister?"

The voice came from behind. The tone was amused.

The girl started, then sinking back on her seat

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with dull expressionless indifference, faced the man who had just entered and caught her last words.

"You seem very sorry for your sister," he repeated, throwing himself back in one of the armchairs, and fixing his eyes on the girl's face with lazy interest.

(When he came to think of it, he had hardly seen this curious little mortal before. What extraordinary eyes she had.)

"Ye—es?" returned the girl, with a kind of question. "I beg your pardon. I——" she yawned a little—"didn't hear exactly what you said!"

Power felt irritated.

"Do you—go to school?"

He yawned this time.

"No—o," said the girl slowly. "Do you?"

"Ha, ha!" Power opened his eyes and sat up a little more in the chair. "Ha, ha!"

He could not quite make out whether the girl was laughing at him or not.

"Is—your—sister in?"

Didums

He looked round at last and under the table, as if he fancied she might be there.

“Yes. She’s *coming*, I suppose.”

The voice was sharper than Power found pleasant. There was no sentiment about it, no softness, no music. Now Power liked music. Blessing Min’s voice was soft. Truly, the little sister-in-law—— Well, she could be sent to a decent finishing school, at any rate. He would see to that.

He looked at her critically, with a look of cold curiosity as she sat with her face in the shadow. Strange that Min should be so fair and the sister so dark. Who had taught the little creature to dress? That dark green stuff suited her creamy colourless face to perfection.

Cecil Power stifled another yawn and glanced at his watch. Of late he was always looking at his watch.

“You were playing as I came in, weren’t you?” he said absently. “I suppose you are fond of music?”

A Silhouette

(Something, even if the girl could manage his accompaniments, since Min was no musician.)

“Oh, yes!” There was a satirical sweetness about the smile that hovered for a minute about her lips. “I am passionately fond of music.”

Power stirred uneasily in his chair. Hang the girl! He glanced at her again from under his eyelids, and drummed his long, strong fingers on the table beside him. He hoped—she was evidently a difficult sort of girl to manage—that there would be no difficulty about his sister-in-law. He tried to guess at her age. Eighteen probably, or less. He wondered if she considered herself grown-up. What did she consider herself? He must ask Min. No, he had scarcely bargained for the sister-in-law. However, there was nothing for it now but to make the best of a bad job.

Power stared at the unshaded gas till the door opened, and Min, a flushed and smiling vision, beautiful enough to satisfy even his fastidious taste, appeared on the scene, a bunch of red-gold chrysanthemums—his chrysanthemums—

Didums

adorning her faded, but perfectly cut, dinner-gown.

But somehow he only got up like a man in a sleep, smiled with unsmiling eyes, and found her a seat with grave, lover-like care, fixing a cushion with grim awkwardness at her back. He had a feeling that something was looking at him—something he could not get away from. He turned with a commonplace on his lips, and caught his “sister-in-law’s” fixed stare. Bother the girl! He moved his chair so that the light did not fall on his face. Did she mean to sit glaring at him with her “eerie” eyes all night. She looked positively uncanny. He would have liked to have bundled her out of the room. He looked at his *fiancée* questioningly—this sort of thing had never happened before. Surely Min looked uncomfortable too!

“Thank you very much for the flowers,” she said hurriedly.

“Oh!” he put that off with a laugh, as the door behind them was gently opened and closed.

A Silhouette

Thank goodness the "sister-in-law" was gone.

"I say," he said, some little time afterwards, as his *fiancée* went into little ecstasies over his new gift—a blazing diamond and ruby bracelet, "I never saw your little sister properly before."

Min flushed.

(If only Didums had had the pink blouse on!)

"You will like to have her with you?" he questioned, feeling all his spirit running out at his heels. "More cheerful for you, or," he went on more briskly, "hadn't she—er—better go to some good school, say Paris, for a bit yet? Good masters—that sort of thing?"

"I—I don't think so," said Min nervously, still intent on her bracelet. "And she does not seem to care about living with us, Cecil."

"Indeed!"

"You see, she teaches music."

"Teaches music! That chit?"

Power folded his arms meditatively across his chest. His mother must not hear of this. His sister-in-law a music teacher! By Jove, this

Didums

would never do! He looked at Min's dress and saw that it was not new. Then he remembered. He must give his little sister-in-law an allowance, and—hang it all!—if she did not live with them, no doubt some place could be found for her. Perhaps his old friend, Lady Montaigne, would board her, and make something of her.

Min did not know what to say to this. She was afraid Didums was very "independent," and one could not drive Didums.

Power smothered a naughty word as he left 15, Court Place, Kensington. He had had a bad day somehow, and his humour had not been improved by his visit to his *fiancée*, nor soothed by little things, the little things that invariably happen at the wrong time. He was suffering from that indefinite state of mind known as "low spirits." He had been melancholy many times before, but he did not now care to remember that he had got over "all those times." He encouraged a kind of moody unamiableness, and treated himself to a fathomless feeling of injury.

A Silhouette

He had begun the day by losing a sovereign, and had seized the opportunity to exhaust himself, but finding the wicked coin—no, *not* under the corner of the carpet, but in his pocket, he had sulked into a real temper. Then—a succession of “thens,” mere pin-points, perhaps, but pin-points that few persons are angelic enough to live above. After all, we are not what we imagine ourselves to be, or what we would be; only what we *are*, and pathetic only to ourselves.

It is not the wickedness in a man's life he desires to screen. It is the stupidity.

Biography is all very well, but the true life of a man has never been written. It would not make suitable reading for the schoolboy, or harmonise with the pomp of death. There is his diary. It tells us of many things; many hopes and despairs, many difficulties magnificently overcome, many high failures and lofty sentiments. But there is no mention of how one day he kicked his dog, simply because his shoelace snapped midway, and of the many days he yawned, wondering where he should go and what

Didums

he should eat, of the amount of bad language he indulged in in the privacy of his chamber over a shirt-stud, of the annoyance, the loss of patience and temper, the nerve-irritation he has suffered from little daily nothings.

* * * * *

"But there will be nothing left if my going-away dress costs seven pounds, and those half-dozen pairs of shoes another five," said Min next morning.

"My hands."

"Bother your hands!" said Min impatiently. "Your *hands* can't last for ever?"

"No, thank goodness."

"Well? Can't you be sensible and give up that wretched idea of teaching? What can I say when anyone asks about my sister?"

"Oh—aw—tell them she's—aw—travelling on the continent with—aw—werry deah old friends—enjoying herself so, deah girl!"

"But you can't be *always* 'travelling on the continent,'" said Min fretfully.

A Silhouette

"No—o. Little change of air now and again!"

Min began to cry.

"It's all very well," she said helplessly into her morsel of handkerchief, "but Cecil is so proud."

"Look here, Min, my dear—sit down—now there 'comfy,' and I'll brush your hair. What hair it is! Threads of sunlight with a meadowy smell. Birdeen, there is nothing worth crying about. I could not tack myself on to you two. A man doesn't like it. It's bad form, in short. I couldn't take his money. I'll get on splendidly, see if I don't. I can have *quiet* little dinners, you know, Min."

Didums fixed little hairpins in the threads of sunlight, singing:—

"Oh, sweet St. Bride of the
Yellow, yellow hair ;
Paul said and Peter said,
And all the saints alive or dead
Vowed she had the sweetest head.
Bonnie, sweet St. Bride of the
Yellow, yellow hair !"

Didums

Min dried her eyes.

"There are people," said Didums, "who let life make them. They sit down and moon in a corner, and don't take the knife by the handle; but I'm going to take the knife by the handle, Min."

"Well — perhaps, after all," returned her sister in a faint tone of relief, "it is as well that you should not be dependent on *us*, you would have had to be dressed decently, living with us; but here anything does, as, fortunately, people don't know you by sight."

Didums said nothing, only drew her veil about her chin and took a red 'bus to a dismal street, to give out another scale to ten dirty little fingers. The little fingers Didums had to do with were never very clean. Nobody "swell" employed Didums. Her grandest pupil, who paid her two-and-six a lesson, and lived in a semi-detached villa with a square plot in front, was a milliner's assistant, who wore half a dozen glittering rings with artificial stones. She "got out" a new bit of "The

A Silhouette

Heart Bowed Down" twice a week, as the young man she was "keeping company with" had a passion for simple hairs with variations.

The days were much the same to Didums; only on Sunday—her day off—she stayed in bed and read all the penny papers Min had bought during the week. Min complained bitterly in having to go to church alone. Didums never went to church. Min did not know where Didums would go to when she died. She supposed she would pass into Nothingness, since she had no "religion," not even a prayer-book in her room, only a fat volume of Robert Browning, heavily scored. Min had opened it one day in a fit of idle curiosity.

"For thence—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail ;
What I aspired to be,
And was not comforts me :
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i'
the scale."

Didums

A *brute!* Min had been horrified. Who in the world was *Rabbi Ben Ezra?*

Min had been obliged to take a teaspoonful of sal volatile.

IV.

MR. AND MRS. CECIL POWER had arrived at —— Place for the season. Mrs. Cecil Power was a success. She was the prettiest woman at the Drawing-Room—though that was not saying much—and her pearl-embroidered gown had been duly commented upon in all the leading society papers. Old friends gushed up to Min with kisses and caresses, and Mrs. Cecil Power was speedily sucked up in the fashionable whirl.

Power began to feel a certain pride in his wife. On the whole he had reason to be satisfied. He felt perhaps only a trifle more bored than of old as he followed her through brilliantly-decorated, flower-perfumed reception rooms, and

Didums

put in a virtuous appearance at everything he hated.

After all he was man enough to want to make her happy. He studied her little likes and dislikes with surprising energy, and loaded her with jewels. It would never be said of him that he neglected his wife.

Power had "ideas," Tiddy said.

On the subject of his sister-in-law Power did not now worry. His wife had told him a long story while they were travelling in Italy, but he had forgotten what it was all about. He was vaguely content to let "Didums" alone.

The only time he had seen her at — Place she had seemed altered for the better as far as manner went, and had looked almost pretty in a black picture-hat trimmed with a black feather. He had noticed the feather.

If he wondered why she did not come oftener to see Min, perhaps he guessed

A Silhouette

that Min was not particularly pressing in her invitations. She did not appear to have any great love for her sister. Perhaps Min's nature was too shallow to care for anyone.

Well, he had got what he wanted—a bit of fine flesh and blood. He had not cared whether there was anything behind that. He had no business to care now. He had not married Min for companionship or spiritual sympathy; he had married mainly to please his mother. He had certainly no business to care now. And yet the gilded framework sometimes fell away, leaving him staring at an autumn picture of weary, unprofitable years. He had expected nothing, and yet it was hard somehow to find there was nothing to expect. It was only an ordinary marriage—that lifeless slough of content that had nothing of heaven or hell to give, where the woman was neither good nor bad, and the man—merely a man.

“I say, old chap,” said Tiddy, meeting him one

Didums

hot June evening in Regent Street, "going anywhere?"

"No," returned Power, doubtfully.

"Well, look here"—hailing a hansom—"come on, and I'll introduce you to the most fetching little widow in London."

Power smiled rather grimly, and shook his head.

"Tut, nonsense, man! You're surely not above a little lark, though you're married. Do you good, haw-haw! *Only* half an hour."

"Who is she?" inquired Power, as they rattled off.

"Who *isn't* she, deah boy? Wait and see. Doosid fine woman, be Jove! Got a bit of the Irish brogue to crown it."

So Tiddy chattered on, but Power was moody, and did not hear.

He followed Tiddy up the staircase of a house in Mayfair, and into a crowded room where music and laughter made up the usual bedlam, and numerous lounges, hid in small forests of green, invited those couples interested

A Silhouette

in themselves alone. Here and there a woman he knew of, a man he knew—boys' young faces flushed with wine and flattery, their expressions a curious mixture of pleased embarrassment and struggling cynicism.

Tiddy elbowed his way through a knot of men gathered about a little woman in blue brocade and diamonds, who was smiling sillily all round.

Power, after the first glance, smothered a delicate yawn. The music was good, at any rate. He frowned at the gigglers beside him; if anything irritated him it was talking when good music was going on. "Send a philosopher to London, but no poet." They might at least have the grace to lower their voices.

He sat down nearer the Brinsmead. These poor wretched pianists had a bad time of it between noise and heat and poor pay. And it was a girl, too, a mere chit of a thing. She could play. That Staccato Study in C was a ticklish bit of work. She had some idea of it, her touch was good, her

Didums

style thorough. Power leaned back in his chair, screened by the pressing crowd, and closed his eyes.

The girl began to play something else—something low, with a sound of the sea. It was sad and odd. No one appeared to be listening but himself. He was enjoying the playing. After all, there were moments, even in the “darksome cell,” when one could free oneself for a little and live.

He looked up regretfully when she stopped. She had risen from the instrument and was trifling with her gloves.

Power looked at her.

What a lovely little face, and what a sad one! A strange little face, made of knowledge—grim, heavy knowledge, born of unavailing struggle of some sort—of ignorance, ignorance of all things that made success. Surely he had seen that girl before? Surely—of course. Who was she again? When——?

Great God! it wasn't *Didums*?—Didums? Good heavens!——

A Silhouette

Power clutched the back of the chair in front of him.

Didums! His wife's sister? Hired by the night by—by anyone who—who cared to have her!

Good God!

Power was a proud man.

So—so this was how "Didums" *earned her living!*

He stared at the palms beside him, then further down at the chattering guests, as if to collect his thoughts. She was evidently preparing to play again. Good heavens! He must stop her—he must stop her. Was anyone looking? Did he know anyone here to-night? He looked round, and met someone's glance. Lady Kit—Lady Kit of all the people in the world! Did *she* know? Did everyone know—that this—this was his wife's sister playing for—for half a guinea or a guinea—and at such a house?

A dusky crimson dyed Power's temples. Then he got pale with anger.

Didums

His *sister-in-law*! And who was that going up to her with that damnable air of insolence? Tiddy! Did Tiddy know? Tiddy knew everything. Had he—he alone been kept in the dark? What was Min about?

Power rose, struggling with feelings he could ill suppress. He caught Tiddy by the arm as that worthy brushed past him a minute later looking somewhat crestfallen.

“Did—did *you* know of this?”

“No. I—I, 'pon my soul, Power, only—er—knew Miss Stormont very slightly. Quite surprised to—er—meet her here to-night—assure you. Er—weally and truly—aw'fly sorry—er——”

Tiddy edged out of the way. He always steered clear of domestic barometers, and when Power got his monkey up the sooner one bobbed under the better.

And Tiddy was speedily absorbed in paying a string of languishing compliments to a bold and fashionable *divorcée*. The player broke into a gay German gallop. Conversation grew merrier.

A Silhouette

Had she noticed her brother-in-law? A strange look had crossed her dark and rather weary-looking face—a look that might have been nervousness.

“Oh! How do you do, Mr. Power? Charming music, is it not? Your wife here to-night? No? What a *treat* she misses. So fond of these bright tra-la-las. Who *is* she, by the way? I must try to get hold of her for my ‘At Home’ on the twenty-fourth. Wonderful execution! How hot these rooms are—positively oppressive.”

Power hardly knew how he got through the next quarter of an hour. He made all sorts of incoherent replies to half a dozen questions, endeavouring by every means he could to screen the pianist with his own broad figure, till at last the opportunity came.

“Come away, come away at *once!*” he said to the girl, speaking hoarsely from behind a sheet of music. “Good heavens, come away!”

Didums

She looked at him and gave him a vacant nod.

"Don't attempt to misunderstand me," he said hotly.

She rose like a queen, smiling with red contemptuous lips, the miserable quiver of which only a close observer would have detected, and rubbed her little fingers into her pulpy-looking tan gloves, as if careless of the look bent upon her.

"Damn you!" he said, exasperated to the last degree, then making a sulky growl of something like apology.

"Don't mention it," she said sweetly, putting number seven button roundly into number seven buttonhole. "I hope my sister is well? What jolly weather we're having, aren't we?"

She gave a little pat to the last glove.

"Wonderful how the dust collects on these pianos!" She was slowly, and to all appearance absently, gathering up her music. "Well, shall we go?"

A Silhouette

She turned at last with a lazy glance.

"Can I give you a lift in my hansom?"

He followed her downstairs with feelings he could not well have put into words, and seizing her cloak flung it about her with rough impatience.

A hansom was there. He bundled her in with scant politeness, but not until she had given the address to the driver in clear little unconcerned tones that did not tend to soothe his fierce irritation.

"Now," he said as they drove off, "will you kindly tell me how long this sort of thing has been going on?"

She made no reply.

"Do you think I found it pleasant to find you—my wife's sister—the hired player in that questionable house? *Answer* me. Have you any conception of the intense annoyance this has caused me? Has it ever occurred to you that I am a wealthy man, and that people will talk. Has it ever, I say, occurred to you?"

Didums

But his words seemed to fall idly on the top of her careless little head.

"I have already offered you an income to keep you in comfort, but I must now insist upon your accepting it. If you don't choose to live with us (God defend him from such an arrangement), at least you will live *as*, and *where*, we desire you to live. Do you understand, once and for all?"

The head moved up.

"I hope you will return the compliment," said the girl passionately, "and understand, once and for all, that I'd rather *die* than accept your money. And if you want my opinion of you, I call you an insufferable prig. What control have *you* over my actions? I earn my bread honestly, and am not ashamed of doing so. If I give up playing in what you call 'questionable houses,' please remember that I do so for my sister's sake, not for *yours*."

"You—you little vixen!" he gasped. "How—how dare you speak to me like that! If—if——" he broke off laughing.

A Silhouette

It was too absurd—a child like this. His amusement for the moment overcame his anger.

“*Insufferable prig,*” indeed!

“I repeat,” he said, “you will accept the income I offer you. I shall see that ample provision——” His gaze travelled down the black cloak.

“Thank you. You are most kind,”—the sweet satire fell with uncomfortable distinctness,—“but as you have already provided for *one* sister, I shall not tax your generosity further.”

She lay back with a sigh of excessive dignity and grown-up-ness. The flare of the lamps crossed her face. She looked a very imp of Elf-land, her short curly hair all disordered about her head, her brown eyes gleaming with yellow fire, her small red mouth a fine folly of prettiness and purpose.

Power gnawed his moustache.

Against his will he was impressed. He had never seen anything like it before. At the

Didums

same time he was still angry, so angry that he drew himself coldly to himself, far away from the tiny pink ear. He had a smilingless way of silence, at times effective, but it had no effect here. She appeared, indeed, to have already forgotten him. Looking at her, without looking, he was conscious of a wild desire to shake her, even as Alice shook the Red Queen.

What could a man do here? Perhaps Min could manage it. He would talk to Min when he got home. Something must be done about the girl. She could not be left to go about in this kind of way, that was certain. As it was, he had a job before him with Tiddy. The story would suffer much "ambiguous giving out" at Tiddy's hands, and if it once got wind it would be very unpleasant.

Power occupied the next few minutes in reflections the reverse of agreeable.

Comparative darkness now. They were nearing Court Place.

A Silhouette

"'Orrible haccident in Switzerland!"

The shrill yell of a solitary newspaper-lad came clear on the night. The girl seemed to wake up from a state of lethargy, starting up in her seat with a nervous catch of her breath. Then she dropped back again, coughing—a hard, hacking cough, beginning to search for something about her pocket.

"What is it?" he asked curtly.

"Only my throat things."

"Your throat things?"

"For *taking*, I mean," she said childishly between coughs, making desperate efforts to hold her breath back. "I've—I've *got* them, thanks."

The hot little gloved hand came against his for an instant in passing into the pocket. For an instant, too, he met the gravely wistful, dark eyes, drowned in their far, their very far-away sea.

Then the "throat thing" went into the mouth.

Didums

"Have you had that cough long?" he inquired stiffly, looking straight ahead.

"A little while."

She seemed half asleep.

Power still looked straight ahead.

"Are we near home?" she asked after a pause, looking vaguely up again.

The imp of a few minutes ago had disappeared, leaving only a tired baby-face, with soft, trusting eyes and tumbled hair, starred with some wee daisies, as if "these were all the little locks could bear."

"Yes," he said sharply, more irritated than softened by her change of mood.

He was not going to be taken in by this little chameleon. He helped her out silently. She had apparently come to her senses again, for she barely gave him the tips of her fingers on the doorstep of 15, Court Place.

"Good-night."

"Good-night," he said.

The lamplight and the moonlight were flirting in the dusk of her hair. One little hand held

A Silhouette

up the long, black cloak. She looked so ridiculously pretty that he had to smile.

As he drove on to his club he told himself he must get someone to look after the little sister-in-law.

V.

POWER sat up that night smoking. He did a thing, too, he did not do often—he hunted up a novel. He decided, on reflection, to say nothing at all about it to his wife.

“I call you an insufferable prig.”

Power lit his fourth cigar and laughed a little, the shadowy kind of laugh that had no very real sound of mirth.

His sister-in-law was a young lady he should not care to meet every day

He pursued the intricacies of George Meredith amid a fresh-rolling cloud of smoke. His light was comfortable and his library spacious—a room of dead men and dull things and Indian perfumes.

He had his moods like other men, moods in which he was conscious of no distinctive thought, no tangible feeling. And he was moody to-night. Naturally, he had been annoyed.

A Silhouette

"Anyhow," he said to himself, as he helped himself to spirit from the stand on the table, and began chapter iii., "she will not try on the 'pianist' business again—something to be thankful for."

It was odd in a way that he had not seen more of the girl before his marriage. He was sorry now that he had not looked into things more, it would have saved him no end of bother and vexation. He did not approve of women working for their living; and this little spitfire was a mere child, and she did not seem particularly strong. It was altogether ridiculous.

Power turned back to the beginning of his volume. He had had quite enough of his "independent" sister-in-law. She could go her own way. Her musical education had obviously not been neglected, but as far as manner went she was all edges, sharp edges too; a headstrong monkey.

"By the way, Min," he said to his wife next morning from behind the *Times*, "been to see your sister lately?"

"No," she replied rather crossly. "Why?"

Didums

How *wretchedly* this cook cooks! These salmon cutlets are simply atrocious."

"Think so? I thought they were all right. Um—see poor Saxon's dead—dear me—quite a young man too. S'pose you'll be looking her up one of these days?"

"Why?" said his wife, with a frown.

"Oh, don't know—pleasant change, I daresay. You must weary occasionally, dear."

Power was getting affectionate. Perhaps he was beginning to appreciate his wife.

"Oh, not at all! I simply haven't a *moment*—not a moment! There's the Hudson's dance to-night and Lady Boothroyd's 'At Home' this afternoon, and no end of things to see about this morning. Didums can wait. I saw her quite the other day, too."

"Um—indeed—*here?*" inquired Power, still from behind the paper.

"Yes," said Min impatiently. "You saw her yourself."

"Some little time ago that, surely, isn't it?"

"I'm sure I don't know; I suppose it is."

A Silhouette

Somehow or other Power thought of the cough just then.

"By Jove, here's old Tom married! that chap I told you about—and to one of the Hope's, by Jingo! Um—sad death of a—— By the way, dear, how much did that infernal old uncle of yours leave you girls a year?"

"Fifty pounds, the horrible wretch!"

"And how much has your sister to live on altogether?"

"I don't know exactly," returned Min, looking up from her letters absently. "One person doesn't need much. She makes a lot of money, as I told you," petulantly, "by private teaching. She knows how to take care of herself—*ra-ther*."

"But she must need a holiday occasionally?"

"Oh, she's awfully strong. I only wish I were half as strong. Besides, she says she hates gadding about. *She's* all right. She's quite content with her piano."

Power turned the sheets of the *Times* slowly. He thought of the melody last night. It went through his head again. He said nothing more.

Didums

Two or three days passed, in which Min fussed and entertained. A thousand little worries crept into Power's life, and deepened the lines of life in his face. He could not say that he knew what they were. To all appearances his wife was faultless. She dressed well, and she looked well, and as far as "housekeeping" was concerned she saw that he got value for his money. Her judgment and prudence were excellent. She did not laugh noisily, her gowns never flapped the wrong way. She pounced upon disorder and gave a touch to the stiffest chair. But Power was not happy. He had the wan look of the married man who has made a mistake, but who is too proud to let the world know of it. He was rapidly settling down, as the thousand settle down every day, to that habit of mind called "resignation."

Once or twice he thought of "Didums." He began to excuse her. After all, she was only a child who had been allowed to grow up as she liked. Probably by this time she had recovered from her little fit of temper. He almost thought

A Silhouette

he would—some evening—take the trouble to call at 15, Court Place, on the chance of finding her in, and see if he could not persuade her to listen to reason. Why, he might even take a turn round *this* evening after he left the club! In a way he was sorry for the stupid child.

Having dined with his friend, Lord Skeffington—a dapper little bachelor of fifty—and having smoked a couple of excellent cigars, Power strolled leisurely in the direction of Kensington. It had rained all day, warm little musical fringes of rain that made the birds chirp, and the flowers flutter in the shady silences of the parks; and the air was June's own, delicious with the smell of fresh earth and refreshed leaves. Power once or twice shut his eyes under his damp umbrella, as if yielding to something vaguely sweet in the summer's night. He felt invigorated by his walk to 15, Court Place. The house looked dark. He rang the bell twice before anyone answered.

Yes, Miss Stormont was in.

Mrs. Bliss, recognising "Miss Min's husband," beamed all over her shining face. No, not the

Didums

dining-room. Miss Didums had "removed" into the parlour at the back. Would he please to step in *this* way?

There was no light in the place, and Power half stumbled over the mat at the parlour door.

Mrs. Bliss was sorry, but Miss Didums was not over fond of much light. Would he wait till she called up the stairs for Miss Didums? Oh, no, she had not gone to bed; she was just coming down to have her supper.

Power sat down on a sofa while Mrs. Bliss hurried off. The room was lit by one lamp, turned low, the light dimmed to a mere flickering glow by an amber paper shade. He looked round the room with curious eyes. What a place! What a miserable hole of a room! Then his eyes fell on the supper. He got crimson, and coughed a little. He had never seen such a supper before. The little morsel of fish on the solitary plate looked dry and frizzled up. The tablecloth looked grey too. Some bread on another plate looked stale and uneatable—it had evidently "done" for some days.

A Silhouette

Power coughed again.

There was a bottle, too, a half-bottle, *well corked*, of some kind of cheap beer.

Power shuddered and turned his back on it instinctively. He did not feel quite so bold as when he had come in. Perhaps he ought not to have come? He looked nervously at the piano. It was open, but it looked the sort of thing one got for five pounds at a sale. Then his eye fastened on a box of cigarettes. He saw they were cheap too—worse and worse. To imagine a young girl smoking these things!

Power dug one hand into the pocket of his light overcoat and tried to hum something.

Then the door was softly opened.

“I—I thought,” stammered Power, bowing, as she did not put out her hand—“I thought I—might come and see you.”

No, she was not confused. She looked at him gravely with stony composure, and stood waiting. Evidently she was not going to ask him to sit down. He fumbled awkwardly with his hat, still keeping his back to the supper-table.

Didums

“I must apologise for coming in at this unearthly hour, Miss Didums——”

Then he remembered she was his wife’s sister. He coughed again—if it had not been for the supper——

“*Didums.*” He corrected himself with an effort.

He had never called her Didums before; he had, indeed, hardly ever spoken to her till the other night.

“May I sit down?” he asked more boldly, angry at his own diffidence. Why, a man ought to be on positively *chummy* terms with his sister-in-law! What was he thinking of?

“Certainly,” she said.

“I came to see you,” said Power bluntly, assuming a position of extravagant ease, and blundering into the very word he had meant to avoid, “about *money* matters. I think that we—we were, perhaps, *both* not in the best of humours when we discussed this little matter before.”

The tone was conciliatory, and unfortunate. He

A Silhouette

laughed, too—an ill-timed laugh, as if to cover it all with the air of a joke, but the girl did not even smile. She stood—a slim, graceful figure in the centre of the room, with a cold, little proud head that never wavered once on the background of faded crimsons and unnamed wild flowers, her dark eyes half hid by still lashes.

“I should like to know,” he went on, horribly put out by the way she was looking at him, “if you are quite comfortable here, and—that sort of thing?” turning elaborate ignorance on the painfully plain answer to the question.

“I thought I would just come and *see*,” he added pleasantly.

“I hope you are satisfied?”

He got scarlet.

“I’m sorry,” he said feebly, “I——”

He lifted his hat from its resting-place on the sofa. Then, as if the words were dragged out of him, “Have—have you any money *at all*?” he asked.

“You would like to *see*?”

Didums

She lifted a leather purse from the top of a small cabinet.

“Well, I’ll gratify your curiosity. There are three shillings, and that is sixpence”—she placed the coins one after one on the table—“and that is a penny, and here—is *another* penny! And *now*”—she looked up with a queer, slow smile—“perhaps you will leave me, as I am hungry.”

VI.

WOULD he try her again?

He asked himself the question several times in the course of the following week. He could not get his little sister-in-law out of his head. He loitered about Kensington Gardens for three evenings in succession, wondering what he ought to do. It was altogether an odd situation for a man to be placed in. The girl was proud—the girl was next door to starving—and the girl was his wife's sister.

But Min—Min did not care. She only had a fit of hysterics whenever "Didums" came up.

Power strolled along Court Place smoking a meditative cigar. His feelings were mixed. He hardly knew whether he felt disgusted with everything or only amused. Poor foolish little Didums.

Didums

He had got the whole story from Evans, Sir William's lawyer. They might have been left well off, but the first will had been torn up—the younger Miss Stormont having told her uncle upon one occasion to “go to the *devil*” with his money.

To the devil it accordingly went.

Poor foolish little Didums—and yet—Power could not help respecting the girl. He passed “No. 15” carefully, but then remembered that the parlour window did not look to the front. If he had only shown a little more tact the night he called. He ought to have coaxed her over. Yes, it was rather an awkward situation—she was such a desperately serious little woman. Would he risk it again or not? She surely could not be offended if he took her a few flowers? Flowers!—the very thing. He wondered what she liked in the way of flowers.

He rang the bell an hour later, having worried a florist to his satisfaction. He felt almost nervous. He had never imagined himself a

A Silhouette

nervous man. Perhaps after all his little sister-in-law would not see him!

Mrs. Bliss beamed like a glowworm, and held the door open, but no—he handed in his card.

Was Miss Stormont *engaged*?

Bliss looked aggrieved. It weren't like her notions of friendly *hintercourse* to be a *haskin'* if a gent couldn't see his own spouse's sister. But there was no keepin' up with the times.

Yes. Miss Stormont would see him.

She was sitting at the piano turning over some music. There was something strained in her attitude, he thought, in the way she kept her head turned away.

Mrs. Bliss drew down the window-blinds with a bang, raised the light with a peculiar flounce of her body, and finally shut the door with a satisfied "clean of her apron."

"I brought you these," he stammered. "Do you like flowers?"

"Very much."

She took the magnificent roses, still averting her face.

Didums

"Won't you—— won't you sit down?" she asked after a pause.

"Thank you," he said.

Another awkward silence.

Power glanced at her furtively, and then looked down at his boots. She was picking a rose-leaf to pieces in a feverish, childish way. She looked timid—as if she wanted to be helped—but he would not help her. She ought to be ashamed of herself—she ought to suffer for these gunpowder bursts of temper. She would get no sympathy from *him*. If he had had anything to do with her upbringing he would have punished her—yes, *punished* her out of it.

"It was very kind of you to bring me the flowers."

A sad, not very steady little voice, that seemed to come from the other side of Otherwhere.

"Oh, not at all, not at all," he answered hurriedly, recrossing his legs and staring up at the china dog which ornamented a wall-bracket.

Silence again. She moved the piano stool. It

A Silhouette

gave a wheezy creak. He knew she was looking at him now, almost beseechingly. He felt the look, even the little "stir of shadow round the mouth," the little movement of the restless fingers round the stalks of the roses. But he did not find words for her.

His chair had become easy—strangely easy.

The lamplight jumped up and down moodily—the wick had evidently not been trimmed properly. A horrible smell of paraffin filled the room.

She coughed.

(The cough wasn't any better then?)

"We've had very nice weather lately!" she said.

"Very nice weather," he agreed, measuring the distance between his toe and his heel with careful exactness.

"I am sorry," she said miserably, "that Mrs. Bliss spilt some paraffin."

"Not at all—don't mention it," he said politely. "Do you—take anything for that cough?"

Didums

"Oh, yes. It's only a throat cough--only irritating to other people."

She smiled a little now, a wistful, tremulous smile.

He came a little nearer.

"Tell me what you take for it."

"Oh, lots of things—*jam*!"

She smiled again, a roguish smile this time, and folded her hands demurely in her lap.

"Ah!" he said with a constrained laugh, "you're fond of jam, are you?"

"Awfully."

"What kind of jam?"

"Oh, *thick* kind, with whole berries—*big* berries, of course."

"Ah!" he said again, "an expensive taste."

He fell into a reverie, his stick motionless now.

He was looking at her profile. It reminded him of a picture he had seen of Burns' "Nancy," and of some lines he had read somewhere:—

A Silhouette

“That patient baby face
 among
Ten thousand faces just the one
I still shall love when all is done,
And life lies by, a harp unstrung.
That face that never can grow old,
And yet has never been—quite young.”

He sighed and spoke again.

“You were playing when I came in, weren’t you?”

“A little.”

“Will you play something to me?”

“Certainly.”

Then she got crimson.

“But the—the piano is a little out of tune.”

The piano “a little out of tune.” He looked at the piano, then once more turned his attention to his boots.

“Never mind. I’d like to hear you play—if—if you don’t mind.”

“It is very bad,” she said.

He looked up again.

“Is it?” he said, his eyes cruelly keen on the lovely, sensitive mouth.

Didums

“Yes.”

She tried to get away from his look by looking at him, but after a struggle the dark lashes fell, pride and pain brave still in the piteous lips. He picked up a sheet of music and turned over the leaves hurriedly, bending hard over them.

“Please play,” he said strangely.

“You can’t *bear* it!” she almost cried with the first notes, “I knew you couldn’t,” forgetting everything now, her own daily suffering unconsciously betrayed.

“Please play,” he said again, very gently.

Then the notes seemed to warm and be sorry. They softened and sighed as if caressed to tears. The birds sang, then the sea sang, then the wind got up and moaned for the home it could never find—never, never. And the old tree, which stood in the shadows, shook its soul over the flower-border and grew sleepy.

The world was so old, and the old pain was so old. If men were tired, why did they not sleep, too? The daisies slept and died when they were tired—why did not men?

A Silhouette

The shadows came in closer. The sad profile grew sadder, the flower-head drooped. She had drifted from mood to mood into a romance of Schumann's.

legato

p

con Ped.

legato

Didums



One tired man buried his face in his hands.

* * * * *

He got up and put his hand lightly on her shoulder, his strong, dark face quivering.

"Little Didums," he said unsteadily, "don't play any more. I mean," he said with a miserable smile, "it's too *good* for me."

"Will you say good-night to me, child?"

"Good-night."

She put out her hand rather coldly.

"Not that way, Didums. Didums"—he tried

A Silhouette

to laugh again—"it's awfully funny that I've never kissed my—my little sister?"

Silence, but for the little clock.

He pressed the little hand—the delicate little hand—the strength of which throbbed in every tapering soul.

"Didums?" he said.

There was something new in his voice, something—God help him—that ought not to have been there.

"Are we never going to be friends, Didums? Are you always going to hate me like this?—always going to keep me out in the cold?"

"Good-night," she said again.

"Didums," he whispered pleadingly, "just to show we're true chums?"

"Oh, no," she said, shrinking back.

"Very well," he said gently.

And he had left the room before she knew.

* * * * *

Didums



"We sometimes dream," he said sadly to himself. Who was to hear? Only the wind, and the wind sighed and wandered away.

VII.

THE world said something had come over Power. He was a changed man since his marriage.

"We all go the same way," Lord C—— reflected mournfully, who was very much married himself.

"We *neva* happen to marry the right woman," whined a boy of twenty, "do we, Tommy?"

"No. Sure as God made little apples you're right there," agreed Chambers; "wrong halves come together somehow. Ticklish thing hooking yourself on to one woman for life. Been near it once or twice"—Chambers surveyed the lighted end of his cigar with cynical interest—"but on the verge of a great passion—the rustle of a wind—the quicker movement of a fan—a laugh instead of a smile. Saved!"

"Lucky dog," gloomed the boy of twenty, who

Didums

had been successfully "manipulated" by a gay young widow, "*uncommonly* lucky dog."

Power had certainly altered since his marriage. His friend Skeffington, with whom he frequently dined—a genial little man with a delightfully boyish weakness for *pouding roulé*—could not make him out. He glanced at him to-night rather curiously as he trifled over a steaming morsel of his fatty favourite. Power was a dreamer—a man of moods. His clear, cold face had a trick of setting—his thoughts of wandering into the dry and voiceless deserts of his own imagination.

"Wife quite well?"

"Quite well."

Yes, there was something up with Power. Skeffington, who was an old-fashioned man with an old-fashioned heart, blundered about in an effort to say the right thing.

"It's a serious thing to marry, Power, but"—Skeffington sighed and tapped his glass—"it's a still more serious thing *not* to marry."

Poor little Skeffington. He had had his own

A Silhouette

love-story. How the world would have laughed had it known! His twinkling eyes, neither blue nor grey, were so round, and his face, flushed just now to an apoplectic purple, suggested something far away from lily-maids and high failures.

"Old thoughts they cling, Power; old thoughts they cling!"

Lord Skeffington sighed again.

"Old story. Married the wealthy fellow; had such a pink-and-white skin, daisies and dimples. Widow now. Met her the other day—scarcely knew her. Daisies all gone, and she's stout. Life's that way. The Creator may make something of it, but here we are, old age creeping on, and we don't know the dickens where we're going. Blessed if *I* can make anything of it."

Poor little Skeffington.

Power, however, was not listening, and smoked a couple of cigars in a preoccupied fashion.

"A handsome woman, your wife, Power. Universally admired."

"Yes."

Didums

Power's gratitude was uncommonly serious.

* * * * *

Min had just returned from the theatre, and moved a pace or two to give full sweep to her apple-green gown.

"I'm not quite satisfied with the piano," she said, referring to the Broadwood upstairs and a musical "At Home" she was giving next day.

Power was reading and did not look up "What's the matter with it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't like it. How much did it cost?"

"It cost two hundred guineas," he said drily; "and at present I have no intention of buying another."

Min glanced at him sharply. Up till now she had had pretty much her own way in everything. But Cecil had been horrid all day, and so cross because she had not asked Didums to-morrow. As if Didums had a decent dress to wear! But men were always the same—so selfish and inconsiderate.

A Silhouette

Min toyed with one of her bracelets for a minute.

"I'll tell you," she said after a pause; "why not sell that little piano in my boudoir? It's a stupid thing, only in the way. It would help to buy another."

Min spoke with an air of injured innocence, helping herself to a strawberry wafer off a small table set with light refreshments.

"Rubbish!" said her husband curtly. It irritated him to see her eat it.

"Well, what's the use of it? It's only in the way, and I hate things in the way. I may as well give it to Didums, then."

"Certainly not," said Power, looking up.

"Well, I—I am sure," said Min, beginning to squeeze a few tears into her lace handkerchief, "it's—it's very hard that—that when I want to give a little present to my—my only sister, who—who is *dying* for a new piano, that—that—I *can't*!"

"By all means give a present to your sister," said Power, rising. "What would she like?"

Didums

An extraordinary look of eagerness had come into his face. He had entirely thrown off his mood of a minute ago.

—"I saw a lovely little Bechstein to-day; or perhaps she would like an Erard—nothing like an Erard for roundness of tone." Power was now talking excitedly to himself. "No, nothing like an Erard; suit her touch admirably. I'll take a turn round the first thing in the morning."

"What—what do you *mean*?" said his wife fretfully, still in her handkerchief. "I'm not going to give Did—Didums a new piano, and you won't let me give her the—the old one?"

"Certainly not." Power flushed angrily. "If you give a present to your sister at all it must be a good one; do you hear? a *good* one."

"Then I—I won't give her—a—present at all," sobbed his wife, leaving the room.

Power, with more force than politeness, shut the door on her disappearing skirts, and fell to thinking and turning over catalogues and price-lists, a boyish kind of glow on his hitherto worried face.

A Silhouette

"An Erard," he said to himself; "decidedly an Erard. Nothing like an Erard for singing quality of tone;—the very thing—the very thing."

The glow deepened into a smile. He could imagine how she would feel it and run about it. She might even kiss it. Poor little Didums! Power wondered if her cold was better; he had not been able to find out, though he had been once or twice in the vicinity of Court Place on—on business.

Power knocked the ash-head rather hastily from his cigar, and gave a frightened glance round the room.

He was getting—imaginative.

He must buy Min the diamond goose-brooch she had fancied the other day, and coax her into it—"From your loving sister, Min." He would get one of the best instruments they had in the place—that was his own affair.

From your loving sister, Min.

She could not mind this. She must know that her sister had enough money to do what she

Didums

liked with. Power scratched a pen over some paper absently. It looked as if he were drawing a plate with a dot in it. Would she have that sort of supper to-night? The pen got slower and slower, and finally there was only a succession of meaningless strokes. A fit of restlessness came over him. He rose, looked at the ornaments on the mantel-piece—bronze figures and bronze candlesticks—but avoided the mirror behind them. For a minute he hummed something, a light little air, meant to be gladsome, and arranged a candlestick, evenly, between two vases. Then, with a movement—a movement odder than his careful rearrangement of the ornaments—he bowed his face in his hands.

Some travel long before making the acquaintanceship of their own souls. Some even imagine they have no souls, till sharply, suddenly arrested. Then "God" sends in His little bill.

VIII.

WOULD she call?

He hoped and feared with the simple misery he had awakened to, a misery more simple because of ripe years.

The Erard by this time had been delivered at Court Place, but his wife had scarcely listened to him about it. She had merely scribbled something to his dictation on the card that had accompanied it, and gone into raptures over the goose-brooch.

Supposing little Didums called?

Min's moods were so extraordinary, and she might have forgotten all about it.

Power stayed in all day, watching from a front window, and reading newspapers with dull eyes that saw nothing, till the thing that he feared had come about. She was smiling, a little pretty,

Didums

excited smile, that trembled all over her face; dressed, too, in quite a *bright* little gown, that down to its holy little hems satisfied his eye, some peach-coloured flowers in the belt.

Power turned the sheets of his paper.

A lady was willing to accept fifteen shillings for an afternoon tea-kettle on "swing stand." Old metals of every description were PURCHASED——

He knew his wife was in the drawing-room, but God alone knew her humour. The goose-brooch had worn off so soon.

He left the window and listened in the corridor. The drawing-room door was open, and every word came clear on his ear like a bell.

"Dear me, Didums, is that *you*?" crossly.

"Oh, Min!"

There followed a sound of breathless kisses.

"My goodness, child, don't ruin my new tea-gown. There! You've crushed all the front. What in the *world* brought you here to-day? Didn't you know this was my 'At Home' day? How awfully unfortunate! There! Sit down,

A Silhouette

for heaven's sake. I'm afraid I can't offer you tea; but you never liked tea."

"Oh, Min!"

"Good gracious, child, what's the matter with you? You're frightfully red; and where did you get hold of that hat? You surely haven't looked at a *Queen* lately. That feather ought to be turned the other way. I'm excessively worried to-day. Lorge, my maid, so *strongly* recommended by the Countess of Heathcote, has actually taken to wearing my cycling fringes!"

"Oh, Min—the piano!"

"Piano! What piano?"

Power set his teeth.

"The—the piano that came to-day! Oh, Min, Min, you darling! I think I cried—I know I made an awful fool of myself. An *Erard*, Min! How did you think of it? Oh, Min!"

"Piano! *What?*"

"I never saw anything so beautiful, Min; and the little card from you—only the little card with that dear message, and—and I used to

Didums

think, Min, you didn't love me! I *had* to believe there was a God, Min. It was *too* lovely!"

"You don't say so! Did he really go and *order* one?"

"What, Min? The piano, dear! I suppose you—you have such lots to think about. But it came about twelve. I can't thank you 'cos—you know that feeling, Min!" The gratitude was choked.

"An—*Erard* did you say?"

"Yes, Min. Wasn't it—wasn't it an Erard you meant?"

"Do you mean to tell me he sent you an Erard?"

"Who, Min? What? *You* did, dear, didn't you?"

There was pain now—a despairing appeal in the voice—doubt, that would still cling pitifully to delight and belief. Her dear piano! Was it not her dear piano after all? Was it all a mistake? Some hideous mistake?

"He was remarkably quick about it," said

A Silhouette

Min with a snort. "He certainly lost no time. And an *Erard*? Why, Erards are *frightfully* expensive."

"Oh, Min! Then—then you didn't send it?"

Heart and hope had died out of the voice that a few minutes ago shook for very excess of girlish delight.

"I send you an Erard? Not I. I'd have as soon thought of sending you my head. There's a *dress* I certainly thought of posting to you. It doesn't fit, and it's of no use to me, but an *Erard*!"

He went in, white to the lips, and straight up to her.

"Leave the room," he said in a thick whisper, "before—I forget myself. Leave the room, will you?"

She laughed in his face and hesitated, then went out, banging the door furiously behind her. Perhaps she was a little bit afraid.

He stood by the fire-place, and looked at a Dresden figure.

"Didums," he said huskily, not looking at her.

Didums

But she did not seem to hear. Her eyes were fixed in a strange, sightless way on the door.

Power cleared his throat with a loud scrape and turned his back, tickling the edge of the mantel-piece with a grass he had pulled out of a vase.

"Didums, am I not your brother?"

She looked at him with queer, unthinking attention, as if something about him had aroused her curiosity.

"You know, Didums dear," Power again cleared his throat, "as you I—I think *said*—your sister has a lot to do just now—that sort of thing. Bit of a headache on. Got—got a bit of a cold myself somehow." Power took out a new handkerchief, and shook out the folds with a jerk. "Weather, I suppose."

Still she did not seem to hear. The peach-coloured flowers in the belt, which had looked so gay from the window, as if put there in a fit of childish glee, were drooping already, as if some of her heart had gone into them. The

A Silhouette

sunlight was hot on the feather that ought to have been "turned the other way." There was a long, long thought on her lashes.

He rolled in his handkerchief and turned to her.

"No, no," she said, as he tried to take her hands, "I'm going home. I'm—I'm so tired. Oh, Min! Min!"

"You won't go home," he said, crushing her gloved fingers in his own. "You will listen to me first."

"Oh, no, no! I wish we had never seen your face!" she said passionately.

He dropped her hands and went back to the fire-place.

"You'll take it *back*, won't you?" she asked timidly now, as if struck by something in his attitude and silence. "Won't you?" she asked again, her voice drowned.

Then he came back to her, and put his arm gently round her shoulders, giving an unseen kiss to the unfashionable feather.

"No, little Didums," he whispered, his mouth

Didums

quivering, "no. You are cruel to me, little Didums. Why are you so cruel to me? Will you not keep the piano, just to show you've forgiven me everything? I think, dear, if you knew how miserable I've been——"

The heavy, misted, grey eyes pleaded till they found hers. The girl seemed to lose herself for a minute in their gaze, then, as if forcing herself from herself, she got up blindly.

"It's so cold," she said, looking round stupidly. Was this Min's drawing-room? She had clung to Min. She had loved Min, but there was no Min, not even in *his* eyes.

There had never been any Min.

* * * * *

That night she had a letter—

"DEAR DIDUMS,

"Please don't come here again; it only worries and upsets me. You know we never did get on, and I thought we had arranged that you would keep out of the way. Perhaps when we go to the country I can arrange to

A Silhouette

have you with us for a few days. That *hat* of yours is hopelessly out of date, and you ought to wear it tilted *towards your nose*, not back on your head. For goodness sake get someone to retrim it. Shot glacé ribbon *always* looks smart, and you might surely do without something else and get a new dress. You were always so extravagant with cigarettes and *music*. I hope you see that the butcher's bill is sent in *weekly*. I am exceedingly vexed with Cecil about that piano. We had quite a row over it. He *is* so thoughtless—orders things in *fits of abstraction*. Keep it *well covered* meanwhile, and I'll see about it later.

“With love, in haste,

“MIN.”

IX.

LADY COTTRELL was one of those agreeable old ladies who remember birthdays and family anecdotes. An old-fashioned grandeur invested her. She wore the most purple of purple violets on the largest of black bonnets, and a liberal flow of silk skirt, with a jet mantle. She made no attempt to disguise her sunny old age, and made the best of everything by cultivating a contented spirit. Her affection for her graceless nephew, "Tiddy," touched even that individual himself. She took an interest in all matters concerning him—paid his bills, and listened to his love-stories. His latest fancy had won her sympathy completely. She longed to see him married to some "nice" girl who would influence him in the right direction, and touch his "higher nature."

A Silhouette

And nothing could be nicer than little Didums Stormont.

Tiddy thought so.

"My intentions are *honourable*, aunt," he said feelingly. "Fact is, it's the real thing this time." Tiddy gave a melancholy twist to his twisted moustache. "You must manage it somehow for me; invite her to the country, that sort of thing. A fellow can't propose on the stairs, and if she won't have me, I'll go to the devil. As it is, for a week or two I am allowing myself narcotics."

The old lady had been much affected by this revelation. She had always thought there were "depths in Tiddy." Now, she knew it. She had a nice old-lady notion that men went to the devil only when they were driven there.

Having promised to do all she could for him, she ordered her brougham, and proceeded to make an afternoon call on Mrs. Cecil Power.

Power was leaving the house as her carriage drove up, and stopped to shake hands.

"Your wife at home?"

Didums

"I'm afraid not."

The old lady looked disappointed.

"I'm sorry," she said, fanning herself vigorously with the end of one of her long, broad, lavender bonnet-strings. "How hot it is. Dear me. Then could *you* spare me a few minutes?"

"Certainly."

Power, who knew her very slightly, and took little interest in his wife's visitors, resigned himself to the inevitable with a somewhat lugubrious smile.

Lady Cottrell, having established herself in a comfortable chair, beamed mysteriously, and held up one finger playfully.

"A little *love-story*, Mr. Power!"

Power assumed a look of polite, if uninterested, attention.

"You know my dear nephew, Tiddy Somers?"

Power nodded, considerably mystified.

"He is a generous, sometimes foolish boy—
young, of course, and inexperienced, but with
many possibilities."

A Silhouette

Power's eyelids lifted, a very faint amusement flickering over his grey-looking face.

"My dear boy has confided his hopes to me regarding a certain young lady, and I've come to-day to ask if you and your wife will allow her to visit me in Scotland—say for a month or six weeks, so that the boy might have more opportunities of endearing himself to her. The air too might do her good. She looks so sweet and fragile, poor darling."

"She? Who?" said Power blankly, a growing fear in his voice.

"Your wife's sister. I've already spoken to her, but she seems to hesitate, dear child."

"Miss Stormont?"

"Yes. Little *Didums*, you know. Now would you trust her to me? I'm an old woman, but magnetic to youth, and I think we could make her happy."

An angry flush passed over Power's face. For a minute or two he trifled with a paper-cutter lying by his hand, endeavouring to put some constraint upon himself.

Didums

"I fear," he said pleasantly, but with slow precision, "that my wife has already made other plans for her."

Lady Cottrell looked at him appealingly through her pince-nez.

"But in the *circumstances*," she said sorrowfully, "would your wife not be induced to change her mind? I love the child, and it will be a crushing disappointment to the boy if he does not win her."

Power gave an ugly smile.

"That," he said, "is a matter for herself to decide."

Lady Cottrell rose, chilled by Power's irreproachable politeness, adjusting her bonnet-strings with some uneasiness.

"Perhaps you would not approve of the match?"

"Candidly—no. Your nephew is young, and a man of—shall we say rather wide views?"

"Views that will *mend*, Mr. Power. Views that will mend. But there! We won't quarrel," playfully.

A Silhouette

Power opened the door.

"We shall see what happens to-night," pursued Lady Cottrell more cheerfully as her silk skirts swept the stairs. "I am taking the dear child to Mrs. Birrell's party. She ought to see a little, you know—and my nephew——"

The dark flush again dyed Power's temples. He had heard enough.

"She ought to see a little!"

Power was furious.

And Tiddy—Tiddy! Fortunately he knew Mrs. Birrell very well. Tiddy's opportunities of endearing himself to his sister-in-law would not be many. He could easily turn up at the Birrells'.

"Lady Cottrell!" said Min, afterwards, glancing at the cards, "old fool. So glad I was out. *Such* an old fool!"

For once her husband agreed with her.

"I'm going to a concert with the Airds to-night," she said at dinner. "One has to know Grieg. We had nothing else to do, had we?"

Didums

“Nothing,” said her husband.

“I almost wish now that I had got Didums to play Grieg to me.”

Min picked at her fish.

Mrs. Birrell's parties were always a success. She had the happy knack of gathering the right people about her—nothing too much of one kind. She was a mystery to her friends, who seldom got hold of P—— or C——. How she managed it no one knew. She was only a pretty woman with a simple manner, who flirted with her husband, and had a way of saying “Oh!” To-night her house in —— Street was a blaze of light. Palms lifted their bold green over delicate roses and tender ferns; these, reflected in the gorgeous mirrors, produced a fairy-like effect, enhanced by the wonderful painted ceilings. The strains of the Hungarian band fell dreamily on the ear, penetrating into the corners of a little room reached through a long corridor, where half a dozen celebrities were talking noisily. Power made his way up the be-palmed staircase about

A Silhouette

nine o'clock, and was effusively greeted by Mrs. Birrell.

"Forgive me for turning up unasked."

"My *dear* boy!"

The pretty hostess flushed archly. Had they not gathered violets together once, long ago?

He stood for five minutes talking to her, his eyes wandering and seeking, his remarks forced and feeble. He saw Lady Cottrell, but he did not see her nephew.

Nor his sister-in-law.

He wandered round, finally into the little room at the end of the corridor, now deserted, save for one couple, who occupied the sofa at the window. He did not see them at once, for, unlike the others, this room was almost in darkness but for the luminous ring thrown off by a couple of candles.

Then he recognised the man and his companion.

Power sat down unnoticed, concealed by the screen at the door, tucking his elbows deep in his chair. His feelings almost frightened him.

Didums

He had thought himself a well-controlled man, but the training of years availed him nothing now. He was only a man mad of love, wild with jealousy, that temporarily blinded him. He saw the glimmer of her frock, a little plain white frock, showing the neck "three fingers might surround." He saw the fringes on her cheeks, heavy, heavy fringes—solemn fringes, and the glorious gloom of dark curls undressed by a ribbon. He had never seen her in white before. Her youth, her delicate loveliness, came upon him like a kind of shock. He saw her now, a little wild-flower, wan and sweet, innocent of its own appeal to love. And he—he to stand aside and see another man——

A child's misery looked out from the lines and hollows that had lately unbecomingly deepened in Power's face. A terrible "world of capability for joy" was to-night roaring about him like a sea—drowning every hard-and-fast rule of thinking—every old rule of life.

He looked at *Tiddy*, the paste-hearted youngling of immaculate elegance, absorbed for the

A Silhouette

moment. What if she loved, or fancied she loved, this fool Tiddy? Power dug his elbows deeper in his chair with a grin of intolerable suffering. Then he rose and went up, easily, with a strong, careless assumption of friendliness.

"Well, Didums!" he said lightly.

Tiddy started, muttered something, then hastily left the room.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said pleasantly.

He took huge possession of Tiddy's lounge.

"I'm afraid I've disturbed a pleasant little chat?"

"Not at all," she said coldly.

He said nothing more for two or three minutes. She drew up one glove and then another, as if impatient of his presence.

"I'm not playing *to-night*," she said petulantly, with a childish jerk of her old spirit.

He looked at her.

"Need you have said that?"

She looked down, a little ashamed.

Didums

He looked down, too, on the big buckles of her shoes.

"Have I to congratulate you?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean."

She got red as the breasts of the robins on the old-fashioned fan she carried.

"I mean, are you engaged to Mr. Somers?"

"No."

He shut his eyes. The candle-light fell on his face. It looked tired—only tired.

"You are enjoying yourself here to-night?" he asked funnily.

"Very much."

She stooped to pick up her little lace handkerchief.

"What is it?" he asked crossly.

"I've dropped something."

He looked for the thing.

"Here," he said; then, as he looked at her, an irrepressible smile broke over his face.

The smile seemed to tease her. She made a ball of the square of lace with restless fingers.

A Silhouette

He looked at the fingers, the smile still lingering in his eyes.

"So you are really enjoying yourself here to-night?"

"Yes."

He sighed.

"Didums," he said unevenly, "Didums"—he laughed a little oddly—"sometimes you look a little *afraid* of me? You're not afraid of me, are you, Didums?"

"Why should I be afraid of you?"

"No, Didums, that's just it. Why should you be afraid?"

He stole the handkerchief from her hand, and buried his mouth in it.

Oh, God, Thou who savest men——

X.

"You see I've come again," he said doggedly a week later.

The Erard, which took up one side of the small room, was shut. He looked at it for a moment as he sat down.

"You can't very well put me out," he muttered wearily, passing his hand over his forehead with a short, harsh laugh, "can you?"

He had changed very much in the few days. He had the look of a man who had been drinking heavily to kill suffering, only to succeed in stinging it to keener agony. His colourless face was gripped in grey lines; the veins in his forehead stood out hard and knotted; there was a grim smile in the depths of his eyes, half defiant, half piteous. It gleamed over the supper-table.

A Silhouette

"Is that the sort of thing you always have?" he asked, leaning back in his chair.

She made no reply.

"Don't look at me like that, child," he said, "or you'll drive me mad."

Then he closed his eyes.

"You haven't tried the piano since, I suppose?"

"No," she said nervously.

"What a queer little mortal you are. You're quite the funniest little woman I know."

She was silent. She had not eaten much all day, and things seemed far away. She pushed aside the little glass of light ale. She did not like to take it now.

"What stuff have you there?" He opened his eyes for a moment.

No, she was not frightened, but she began to see she would have to do something. With an effort, and at a cost she was hardly conscious of, she did the thing most calculated to disgust him. She lit a cigarette, blindly striking at three foolish little matches to get it to "go."

Didums

"Yes, *smoke*," he said; "I'd like to see you smoke."

He flung back his head on the cone-shaped cushion attached to the top of his chair, watching her steadily from under slow eyelids.

Then he smiled.

"It takes a nice girl to smoke prettily," he said musingly.

She blushed all over her face.

The smile gleamed and dreamed. There was a sort of exultant calm in it now.

"Why aren't you smoking?" he asked.

She fumbled with the mouth-end and looked down.

One curl came dark over her forehead.

"Why aren't you smoking?"

The little mouth quivered.

"Pity to waste the cigarette, isn't it?" he observed lightly, tapping his cuff with the point of his stick.

Then he rose.

"Give me the thing," he said, laughing strangely and sitting down at her feet. "Dear

A Silhouette

me, how tight you've got it! Open your little fingers like a good girl. Thanks!"

He leaned back a little against her knee, sending up dreamy little rings, his gaze fixed motionlessly on the empty fire-grate with its cheerless attempt at "decoration." An absolute stillness reigned through the room. At long intervals the wail of weary things, toiling eternally.

It might have been minutes, or hours, when, slowly turning, he took her hands.

"Child!" he said huskily.

She stirred a little, moaning.

He gathered the little hands closer, and with a dull sob dropped his face to her dress, nestling the little fingers to his eyes.

Stillness again, breathing stillness. Outside in the old tree a little wind came up fussily.

"Didums," he said, "I am so tired. Little One, let me feel near God to-night. Put your little hands on my head, close, so. God's little baby Didums! Sweet, sweet, *dear* little hands."

The summer twilight was deepening into

Didums

night, the shadows in the little room were growing grey.

"Dear little hands! No, don't take them from me. Leave them, leave them with me till I *feel* them. It can't harm you, it can't harm you, Little One. Let me dream for a minute; even the Devil has had his Dream."

The wind came again through the old tree, not fussily now, but with sighs.

"Didums, when I first saw you hadn't you a little red ribbon somewhere about your hair? I know I wanted to hate you, horribly."

He laughed, a low, young laugh, and kissed her fingers, slowly and separately, with jealous care. Already the Glory had come to his face, the sweets of a hundred hills to his voice. The Book of Love is so easy, and the angels sometimes forget to shut it.

She tried to move. The room began to go round, funnily. She was surely not Didums any more.

"Didums, why didn't you smoke the cigarette?" He laughed again. "Why didn't you,

A Silhouette

Didums? Give me your little ear, and I'll tell you."

He rose to the level of her chair, and stole her into his arms, crushing her resistance with croons of inarticulate tenderness, pillowing the dark head over the white rose drooping in his coat.

"Shall I tell you, Didums?"

The perfume of the bruised petals wrapped her as in a mist. She was being borne away, away, past thought and time.

"Ah, Didums, why? Don't struggle, Sweet; you've struggled all your little life. My brave, unloved little Pet."

But she did not hear now. She was praying a far, fast, terrible prayer, while with his strong, gentle hands he was loving the dusky curls, whispering over them as if some ache had to be forgotten for her, some hurt of life.

The shadow of the old tree grew longer. Far above it foams of amethyst died along the sky.

"Love, speak to me; *speak* to me, Little Love!"

Didums

His mouth went to hers hungrily, then solemnly, entreatingly.

"Didums!——" his breath laboured convulsively, and hushed itself with rapturous reverence on the lovely neck, on the silken silence of her closed eyes—"I love you! I *love you!* Oh, the weary, weary ways without you, Sweet! the weary, weary ways!"

His voice dropped in wooing content.

Yes; she was getting herself back—pushing him, pushing him—wrenching herself out of his grasp, struggling with desperate, awful strength. Then the cry came—the piteous, pleading, heart-broken cry.

"You're mad! you're mad! You must be *mad!* No—don't touch me—don't—oh, don't! Don't come near me! Try, try, *try* to remember!"

The silence ticked on. The wind came about the house with a wild yelp, tearing down the chimney with an oath. Then it shivered away.

He looked at her curiously.

Then he spoke, with odd indifference, drawing his hand over his brow.

A Silhouette

“Yes, as you say, I had forgotten.”

The little cushion he had been kneeling on got in his way. He picked it up and laid it on the table, smoothing out the frills with strange care; looked at her again with wistful eyes, from which all intelligence had fled, then turned away quietly and went out, closing the door gently behind him.

* * * * *

Mrs. Bliss knocked, and knocked again; she wanted the supper-tray. But the supper was still untouched. Miss Didums, too—what had come over Miss Didums?

“Dearie o’ me, if the child haven’t agone and faint! That’s what comes of livin’ on slops of tea without a bit of solid victual to refresh your dinner man. Them wealthy gents—they’s talk fine with their bows and bit observations; but they knows precious little of the real troubles of this ’ere world. Now there’s her drop hale not taken neither! Now mightn’t they ask her to a bit dinner at their establishment, with all

Didums

their menoos and what not? Miss *Didums*, my lamb! But, as I always said, they grandees—they only spread themselves out as a green bay tree of rustle and selfishness as passes away, as the Scripture says. There, my bairn, you don't try no talkin'; and I'll bring you a cup of harrowroot."

No—Miss Didums tried no talkin'.

XI.

MRS. BLISS could not make it out.

Mr. Power wanted to see *her* in her *own* parlour, and most expressly said not Miss Didums.

The maid-of-all-work was hardly credited. Mrs. Bliss smoothed her hair and put on her black silk apron. Would Mr. Power please to walk into her 'umble room and be seated? Her late lamented husband had often *h*observed as there was no place like *'ome*.

Mr. Power thanked her, but would not sit down, and stared at the artificial plums in the thin glass case on the table. "Have you any other rooms but that parlour Miss Stormont has?"

Mrs. Bliss, with an eye to business, bowed and fluttered.

"Most certainly, sir; there's the drawin'-

Didums

room habove and the dinin'-room below, as you'll most likely recollect when you used to visit 'ere before."

Power made no remark.

"Would you be thinkin' of sending a party 'ere, sir, as Lady Cottrell, who had the drawin'-room swet, left last Tuesday? I'll be 'appy to show you the rooms, sir. The drawin'-room is decorated in yeller, sir, with silk 'angings and hariegated chintz, with bamboo table complete. The ladies, sir"—this with sly good-humour—"won't be doin' without their tea. Yes, sir. This way, sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bliss. I'll take your word for it. I merely called to have a little talk with you about my sister, Miss Stormont, feeling that we look upon you as an old friend."

"And *well* you may, sir, and well you may!" With the instinct of her kind, Mrs. Bliss lowered her voice and rubbed her hands, as if to oil her utterance. "And, and anything in *confidence*, sir——"

A Silhouette

Mrs. Bliss broke off importantly and shut the door. She had not lived in the world for "nothing."

"Miss Min's husband," however, did not follow up the invitation with the alacrity expected of him.

He winced, and spoke with an evident effort.

"I am anxious, Mrs. Bliss, naturally anxious, that Mrs. Power's sister is made—that she has every proper attention, you understand."

"Naturally, sir! Being the gentleman you are. I always says I knows a *gentleman*, sir—and my late lamented——"

"Can you tell me," broke in Power, "when the cough began? She seems to have had a cough for some little time. Young ladies"—the ghost of a smile shadowed his face—"are thoughtless at times, a little *careless*, you know, Mrs. Bliss, overrate their strength, that sort of thing."

Mrs. Bliss screwed the corner of her silk apron thoughtfully between her fingers.

"Well, sir, she do cough, I've noticed that,

Didums

and long ago, sir, I *had*vised a little rest, but she do work at them scales, and goes out all weathers. And as I always say, sir, the seed of mortality is in us all, and any inwersions of the law of *nature*, sir——”

Power still looked at the plums.

“Has she everything in the way of nourishment — port - wine, beef - jelly, that sort of thing?”

“Well, sir,” Mrs. Bliss looked down again at her apron, “as we’re speakin’ *plain*, I’ll just say this, Miss Didums can’t afford it. Many a day my ’art’s *hached* and *hached* for her workin’ and workin’ with music, and the pay’s *poor*, sir, beggin’ your leave. Them fine arts, sir, as far as I make *hout*, don’t bring much comfort with them. It’s wearing to the spirit, sir, it’s all that. But I’ve done my ’umble best to spread her butter as far as it’ll go, as the sayin’ is, and always sees, sir, as she has a bit of steak every *hother* day.”

The plums still absorbed Power’s attention.

“But if there’s anything further I can do, sir,

A Silhouette

I'll be most 'appy to do it, most '*appy*. Will you not sit down, sir? You seems, beggin' your pardon, sir, over-fatigued. The heat's tryin', sir, to the strongest."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bliss." Power remained standing. "How is Miss Stormont to-day?"

"Well, sir, I am sorry to say she's in bed, and has been for the last week. I think, sir, 'twere that very evenin' you was 'ere last as I found her in a dead faint, and since then she's been so weak, sir, and no spirit somehow, always starin' at nothing, and wishin' to be left quiet."

Dead silence.

"But I think, askin' your pardon, sir, as a little good wine——"

Still silence.

"She promised me, did Miss Didums, as she'd try to get up this evenin'. Perhaps, sir, a little cheery talk with yourself would do her good. She seems lonesome like whiles, nobody comin' about her, sir. She's but young, sir, and it do seem a pity as she won't be kinder to the young gent as comes with bouquets."

Didums

"Gentleman?"

"Mr. Somers, sir. He's always comin' a hasking and hasking when she'll be in, and so sorrowin' like, and standin' about."

"Does she see this gentleman at all?"

"Well, sir, *very* hoccasionally. She's generally hout when he calls, and when she's hin, she's not at 'ome, as the sayin' is. Beggin' your pardon, sir, you do look fatigued, but if you would sit down, sir——"

"No, thanks, Mrs. Bliss, no, thanks." Power looked at his watch. "I'll certainly call this evening and see my—my sister, but—but perhaps it might be as well not to—to mention so to her. So little disturbs an invalid, and I merely called to ask about this cough. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bliss, I hope you will see that everything she can possibly fancy is got for her. I know I can trust you."

"That you can, sir, that you can."

Mrs. Bliss received the couple of bank notes with much satisfaction, and the extra couple of sovereigns for "herself." It was not every day

A Silhouette

she made a couple of sovereigns so easily, and, to do her justice, the money to provide jellies and dainties for "Miss Didums" was quite as welcome. The "bairn" had been "on her mind."

As far as "Miss Didums" was concerned Mrs. Bliss was honest enough.

"With regard to wine, that I'll order myself."

"Very good, sir, very good."

"You need not let her know I've been here this morning," he said as he left; "and don't let your drawing-rooms till I see you again."

His gaze travelled over the house as he turned away, and rested on one little window at the top, the blind of which was down.

"Oh, my God!" he said, "how can I bear it?"

Yet in the conflicting tumult of his miserable thoughts a mad, sweet wonder stole a little of the bitterness. Had little Didums come near loving him a little after all? Had *he* helped to make her sad? She had been ill since—since—— One moment of heaven suffused his eyes and filled his throat.

So sad are some moments of heaven.

Didums

So "sinful."

He went on his way blindly, praying prayers for her—soundless prayers—appealing to her, too—to her little hands, her solemn eyes.

"Tell me again 'to try to—*remember.*'"

XII.

Two conversations took place that afternoon.

One at the "exclusive club."

"Your attentions, I repeat, are unwelcome."

"And whose attentions are welcome?"—an ugly sneer accompanied the words. "Your own, I presume?"

A dark red shot across Power's temples.

"Take care," he said quietly.

"Exactly—'*take care*'"—Tiddy spoke from behind a paper. "To speak seriously, Power—a thing, mind you, I don't do often—you're taking a deal too much interest in that little gal—a deal too much. Seems to me you're on the eve of making a fool of yourself. Now a man may be anything but—haw-haw. Sister-in-law quite a new idea!"

"Another word, and——"

Didums

“Speak soft, Power; speak soft. These little scenes are not in my line. If I choose to admire your sister-in-law that is my affair, not yours, and”—Tiddy coughed—“*my* intentions are honourable.”

“Take care,” Power repeated, white with passion.

“Good Lord, what a tempah you have! No use kicking up a dust over little ‘Didums.’ You’re a fairly good actor, Power, but if you like to have it plainly—we’re so extraordinarily innocent, bless us—I happened to be—er—paying my dear Aunty Cottrell a visit about a *week ago*! An attractive corner of the world 15, Court Place—roses and all the rest of it!” Tiddy coughed again. “Must see about the Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill at this rate. Haw-haw! Your little game’s transparent, deah boy; painfully so. Shake hands over it. Cherish no ill-feelings myself. Hope you will enjoy your second honeymoon—*heather* honey this time, eh?”

Power struck him on the mouth, and went out

A Silhouette

—too sick with fears, too wretched to reckon the consequences of the act. The worst had happened. What more could happen? Tiddy would leave it to his hearers to draw their inferences. How well he knew the shrug—the nod—that would do it all.

For himself he did not care—but, God, that child!

The only thing he could do for her now was not to see her again, to go away, and take Min with him. He would make a last appeal to Min to go to see her sister, and then, doubtless he would live.

He could not yet think of that “life.”

He went home to Min.

Min had visitors.

When he did see her she poured him out a cup of lukewarm tea, fretfully.

“Why didn’t you come in? That bothering Mrs. Marsh was here, and I can’t talk to Mrs. Marsh. She’s mad on religion—says I’ll turn into a mouse or something—so horrid.”

“Mrs. Marsh!” he said stupidly.

Didums

"Wants me to take a stall at her bazaar for deserving charwomen. Such a nuisance."

She dropped a lump of sugar into his cup.

"*Two*, did you say?"

Min helped herself to a biscuit.

"By the way, why did you not tell me you saw Lady Cottrell the day she called? I've just had a note from her. Did she really ask Didums to go up to Scotland with them next month?"

"Yes—she——"

"But I made no plans for Didums. She speaks as if the invitation had been *refused!*"

Power stirred his cup of cold tea.

"I refused the invitation."

"You refused the invitation? What do you mean? Such a chance for her! Give her the tone she needs and trim her up a bit. Certainly, Tiddy Somers is *ra—ther*——" Min laughed agreeably. "But it would be so desirable to have her settled and off my mind——"

The stupid look was growing on Power's face.

"I did not think it desirable——"

A Silhouette

"Desirable! Why, you must be mad! She'll never have a chance again. It means a few dresses, certainly, but I daresay Lorge can manage that without much outlay."

"I have *refused the invitation*," said Power again.

"Yes, but I shall accept it. I can easily explain——"

"You will explain nothing," his voice was funny—he broke his biscuit in two, "and someone told me to-day—I forget who—that your sister was *ill*. Before you accept the invitation had you not better go to see her? Perhaps you might think of going round to-night?"

His foot was swinging against the back of her poodle.

Min uttered a cry.

"Take care of Jou-jou!"

He kicked the dog.

"Oh, you—*brute*!"

She sprang from her chair and snatched up the yelping animal, caressing it with kisses.

Didums

"Poor oolly ittle——"

Power rose.

"Will you, or will you not, go to see your sister to-night?"

"Look at its poor little leg!"

"Do you *hear* me?"

"I believe you've *broken* it!"

For a minute or two he said nothing.

Jou-jou was established on a gold satin cushion, and was now lapping up some sugary milk from a saucer.

Power leaned against the mantel-piece, with a face like death.

When he spoke again he spoke wearily, as if he were only thinking.

"Your sister is ill. Could you not go to see her?"

"I *can't* go to see Didums. I'm dining with the Vernons and going to see that new play by young Hearn, to-night. I've got more to do than bother over every little petty ailment of Didums'."

"She's been in bed for a week," he said.

A Silhouette

"Oh, I daresay. If you let her alone she'd stay in bed always."

Min glanced at her watch and left the room.

Power locked himself in his library And the night grew.

Min's silken skirts rustled downstairs. And by-and-by the brougham drove up—and away.

He was alone. It flashed across him horribly that he was alone.

There are moments in life when we seem to have expected that "God" would support us. After all, we must have been believing in something.

Nothing.

Outside the wheels rattle in the streets.

Power wondered if he was going to see Didums. It was such a *little* way—to see Didums.

Right? Wrong?

What was right? What was wrong?

Words—words.

If anything lived it was *Love*—the best part

Didums

of a man. If anything survived the hideous nightmare of human struggle it was surely this one pure, beautiful thing. The rest must fall away—a bad dream—a mere jingle of sounds and mockeries. If there was anything after “this” it was something men did not dream of—a “God” no one had thought of—a God with a *heart*—a human heart. What did “*God*” think of marriage, when people neither killed each other nor poisoned each other, but only politely wished each other dead?

Marriage!

A *holy* bond truly! And for a mistake to give one’s life! Suffering was all very well, up to a certain point call it a soul-stimulant, but after that the “soul” was apt to shrivel up. Suffering was never without its effect. It must either ennoble or degrade. In former circumstances “suffering” might have made something of him. Even had he failed to win her love, at least he would have been hers. Nothing could have robbed him of the dignity. But *here*—a hell in which he was linked to a pale-coloured fiend,

A Silhouette

who took her food well and slept well. He could have endured her, perhaps, had she been as ugly as a toad, but "Min" was pretty. Ha! ha! Min was "*pretty*."

They said "right" was doing the hardest thing.

He bowed his grey face on the table.

But, ah, dear heaven, he might have won her love! How could he turn his face away into the desolate years—leave her so? Could he not, in some land of God's, hold her in such precious keeping that the glad sunlight alone would dare to touch the pretty crown of her hair—so that she would never remember, never understand, the shadow that divided her from the cold-judging, false-rolling world? Could he not lift her out of it all?

The sadder silence said "No." There was no beginning over again, no fresh chance. The doors were shut—the prison doors—the making of his own ignorant hands. The mass of men led lives of "quiet desperation," but it was characteristic of wisdom "not to do desperate

Didums

things." Love was not love that made its own paths with hot, impulsive hands. There was no way out—no sweet way. Here *love* was doing the hardest thing. Had he only been free! Oh, God, had he only been *free*! *Had he only known!* What life might have been had he only had that little hand.

But men rambled on, and never thought they would meet anything.

He could not "lift" little Didums, might never dare to be kind to little Didums. For him only a narrow future, wherein he must hold himself, showing no sign, looking no look, masking the years and the hours in the old petrific smile.

* * * * *

"My little flower—my dear one,—

"I am going away somewhere. Will you try to forgive me for loving you? Do, dear little one. If ever you pray to anything, will you pray for me? I could not *help* loving you, sweet. I had to love you. I can never kiss the shadows

A Silhouette

from your eyes. I can never see you again—I can only say good-bye. If there's a heaven, they can't keep me from you *there*. I shall be free to love you there.

"Sometimes, Didums, think of me in the dark. Perhaps in a dream you will come to me for a little while and I shall feel your hand. It will help me to be a good boy. Don't be afraid, little Didums, that I'll not try to be good, though it's all a void. Will you send me that little ribbon you wore in your hair? Only the little ribbon. You won't mind that, dear, will you? God would allow that. And will you take *care* of yourself?"

He broke down here.

How could she take care of herself? If she had even had a home, or a mother, or a sister; but she had no one—nothing. She would die—slowly and surely she would die, as so many young, delicate, sensitive girls died from that refined torture of want—that deadly day after day pining for a little love, a little sunshine and tenderness. Just for *little* things she would

Didums

die—for flowers and kisses and kind eyes. The little things Love only knew. And such little things would have satisfied her, and he might have given her such big things. The infinite delight of thinking and planning for her — of showering his love on her, of nursing the glad life-glows to that child-face.

His hands clenched the back of his chair.

“I’m not strong enough, Little Didums. I’m not *strong* enough!”

His thirsting eyes travelled to the door, then rising he moved across the room as across a darkness.

She—would tell him—what to do. She would tell him.

The night was grey for a summer night, with a roof of passionless purples. He went out like a man in a sleep, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, his thoughts stumbling in child-moan, an old hymn making dronish music in his mind.

“The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on.”

A Silhouette

He felt quieter as he walked—even glad. He was nearing her—he loved her. He was tired, tired—he was going to her.

He bought her some roses—beautiful, fair things. She liked flowers. He touched their delicate petals dreamingly— even smilingly—with a smile that loosened his mouth in ripples of light.

XIII.

MRS. BLISS looked anxious as she met him at the door. Miss Didums had got up, but she had had to carry her downstairs; and she was so weak-like and strange, and wouldn't take nothing, not even the champagne or the grapes. And she—Mrs. Bliss—made so bold as to say that Miss Didums' condition *merited a physician*.

At first he could not see. He only leaned heavily against the door. Then, on the sofa, pushed up against the window, he saw the yellow gown and the dark head.

She was sleeping; she did not move.

He came up softly, holding his breath and listening. Her cheeks looked pale as the petals of the roses he carried; the long lashes were quiet—so quiet. He knelt down beside her, leaning his head to the cushion softly, and kissed her hair, his hungry eyes devouring her.

A Silhouette

Yes, she was ill, and her poor little hands were so cold—so cold. He took them gently in his own warm ones, laying the roses at her feet.

If she had not been so little! Oh, God, if she had not been so little! The mouth looked so patient, too—the sad, baby, little mouth.

He put one arm round the cushion, his soul bursting.

“Love!” he whispered.

She smiled dreamily as if she saw the sunlight far away.

“*Little Love!*” he whispered again.

But she only sighed—a long, long contented sigh, moving her curly head a little till it came against his.

Far away the Stars were shining in Space.

“Who’s that?” she asked in a wondering breath as a tear splashed on her forehead.

“Me.”

She smiled again—the same dreamy, sweet smile, and came closer to him, putting her little wasted arms round his neck.

“You! Oh!”

Didums

The little smile died in the contented sigh again. She opened her eyes vaguely, and tried to nestle closer.

"I thought it was you, but I felt the rain. It was such a *long* way."

"Yes, Dear," he murmured.

An awful fear came upon him.

"When did—you—come?"

"Just a little while ago, Dear."

"Oh!"—the sigh again—"I waited for you—so long. There was a spider on—the wall—and it wouldn't—go up."

"*Darling*," he said with growing agony, trying to free himself gently from her. He must get light—the woman—the doctor. He made a blind effort to reach the bottle of champagne that stood on the table, but the little hands refused to unknit from his neck.

"Don't"—the breath was now coming in quick, hurried gasps—"oh, don't—go away."

He bent over her again, crazed.

"Take me up—to—to you," she whispered. "I—I can't *see* properly."

A Silhouette

His breath moaned. He gathered her to his breast.

"Are you 'comfy' now?"

"*Very*—comfy—and—the—stars—are out."

"Oh, my God!" he cried, "not this! Oh, my God—my darling!"

But the clock only ticked louder.

He moved his lips in speechless despair, his iron arms stiffening about her.

"Tell—Min I—kept—the piano—covered."

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